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## ► To cite this version:

Marc Deléglise, Jean-Louis Nicolas. Maximal product of primes whose sum is bounded. Proceedings of the Steklov Institute of Mathematics, 2013, 282 (1), Supplement, pp 73-102. 10.1134/S0081543813070055 . hal-00733104

**HAL Id: hal-00733104**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00733104>**

Submitted on 17 Sep 2012

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# Maximal product of primes whose sum is bounded

Marc Deléglise and Jean-Louis Nicolas \*

September 17, 2012

To the memory of A.A. Karatsuba, on  
the occasion of his 75th birthday.

## Abstract

If  $n$  is a positive integer, let  $h(n)$  denote the maximal value of the product  $q_1 q_2 \dots q_j$  for all families of primes  $q_1 < q_2 < \dots < q_j$  such that  $q_1 + q_2 + \dots + q_j \leq n$ . We shall give some properties of this function  $h$  and describe an algorithm able to compute  $h(n)$  for any  $n$  up to  $10^{35}$ .

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Function $h(n)$

If  $n \geq 2$  is an integer, let us define  $h(n)$  as the greatest product of a family of primes  $q_1 < q_2 < \dots < q_j$  the sum of which does not exceed  $n$ .

Let  $\ell$  be the additive function such that  $\ell(p^\alpha) = p^\alpha$  for  $p$  prime and  $\alpha \geq 1$ . In other words, if the standard factorization of  $M$  into primes is  $M = q_1^{\alpha_1} q_2^{\alpha_2} \dots q_j^{\alpha_j}$ , we have  $\ell(M) = q_1^{\alpha_1} + q_2^{\alpha_2} + \dots + q_j^{\alpha_j}$  and  $\ell(1) = 0$ . Note that  $\ell(n)$  is sequence A008475 in OEIS (cf. [12]). If  $\mu$  denotes the Möbius function,  $h(n)$  can also be defined as

$$(1.1) \quad h(n) = \max_{\substack{\ell(M) \leq n \\ \mu(M) \neq 0}} M.$$

Note that

$$(1.2) \quad \ell(h(n)) \leq n.$$

From the uniqueness of the factorization of  $h(n)$  into primes, the maximum in (1.1) is attained at only one point. It is convenient to set

$$h(0) = h(1) = 1.$$

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\*Research partially supported by CNRS, Institut Camille Jordan, UMR 5208.

$(h(n))_{n \geq 1}$  is sequence A159685 of [12]. A table of the 50 first values of  $h(n)$  is given at the end of the paper. A larger table may be found on the authors's web sites [2, 10].

In [9], Landau has introduced the function  $g(n)$  as the maximal order of an element in the symmetric group  $\mathfrak{S}_n$ ; he has shown that

$$(1.3) \quad g(n) = \max_{\ell(M) \leq n} M.$$

The introductions of [5] and [3] recall the main properties of Landau's function  $g(n)$  which is mentioned as entry A002809 in [12]. From (1.1) and (1.3), it follows that

$$(1.4) \quad h(n) \leq g(n), \quad (n \geq 0).$$

In this article, we shall give some properties of  $h(n)$  and describe an algorithm able to calculate  $h(n)$  for any  $n$  up to  $10^{35}$ .

## 1.2 Notation

- We denote by  $\mathbb{N}$  the set of non-negative integers.
- The symbol  $p$  will always denote a prime number.
- For every arithmetic function  $f : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ , we define

$$(1.5) \quad \pi_f(x) = \sum_{p \leq x, p \text{ prime}} f(p)$$

- In particular, for  $f(n) = 1$ , we will note, as usual  $\pi(x) = \pi_1(x)$  the number of primes up to  $x$ .
- For  $f(n) = n$  we define

$$(1.6) \quad \pi_{id}(x) = \sum_{p \leq x, p \text{ prime}} p$$

- We denote by  $p_j$  the  $j$ -th prime and we set  $\sigma_0 = 0$ ,  $N_0 = 1$  and, for  $j \geq 1$ ,

$$(1.7) \quad \sigma_j = \pi_{id}(p_j) = p_1 + p_2 + \dots + p_j, \quad N_j = p_1 p_2 \dots p_j.$$

In § 3, for all  $j \geq 1$ , we shall prove that  $h(\sigma_j) = N_j$ .

- If  $m$  is an integer, we denote by  $(m)^*$  the smallest prime  $p$  satisfying  $p \geq m$  and, if  $m \geq 2$ , by  $^*(m)$  the largest prime  $p$  satisfying  $p \leq m$ .
- $P^+(m)$  (resp.  $P^-(m)$ ) will denote the largest (resp. smallest) prime factor of  $m \geq 2$ . It is convenient to set  $P^+(1) = -\infty$ ,  $P^-(1) = +\infty$ .

- $\omega(n)$  is the number of distinct prime factors of  $n$  and  $\Omega(n)$  the number of prime factors of  $n$ , counted with multiplicity.  $\mu(n)$  is Möbius's function.
- for  $x > 1$ , we denote by  $\log x$  the natural logarithm of  $x$  and by  $\log \log x = \log(\log x)$  the iterated logarithm of  $x$ .
- $\text{Li}$  is the integral logarithm defined for  $x > 1$  by

$$\text{Li}(x) = \lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0, \varepsilon > 0} \int_0^{1-\varepsilon} + \int_{1+\varepsilon}^x \frac{dt}{\log t} = \gamma + \log \log x + \sum_{n \geq 1} \frac{(\log x)^n}{nn!}$$

where  $\gamma$  is Euler's constant.

### 1.3 Functions $h_j(n)$

For  $n \geq 0$ , let  $k = k(n)$  be the non-negative integer defined by

$$(1.8) \quad \sigma_k = \pi_{id}(p_k) \leq n < \pi_{id}(p_{k+1}) = \sigma_{k+1}.$$

It is the maximal number of prime factors of  $h(n)$ . For  $0 \leq j \leq k = k(n)$ , let us set

$$(1.9) \quad h_j(n) = \max_{\substack{\ell(M) \leq n \\ \mu(M) \neq 0, \omega(M)=j}} M$$

where  $\omega(M)$  is the number of prime factors of  $M$ . For  $n \geq 0$ , we have

$$(1.10) \quad h_0(n) = 1$$

while, for  $n \geq 2$ , we have

$$(1.11) \quad h_1(n) = \star(n) \geq 2.$$

Note that

$$(1.12) \quad \ell(h_j(n)) \leq n.$$

In §6, we prove that, for all  $n$ 's, the sequence  $h_j(n)$  is increasing on  $j$ , so that

$$(1.13) \quad h(n) = h_k(n), \quad (n \geq 0).$$

Our proof is not that simple. A possible reason is that this increasingness relies on the properties of the whole set of primes  $\mathcal{P}$ . Let  $\mathcal{P}'$  be a subset of  $\mathcal{P}$  and  $\mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{P}'}$  the set of integers whose prime factors belong to  $\mathcal{P}'$ . We may consider

$$(1.14) \quad h_j(n, \mathcal{P}') = \max_{\substack{M \in \mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{P}'}, \ell(M) \leq n \\ \mu(M) \neq 0, \omega(M)=j}} M.$$

By choosing  $\mathcal{P}' = \{2, 3, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, \dots\} = \mathcal{P} \setminus \{5, 7\}$ , we observe that

$$h_2(24, \mathcal{P}') = 11 \cdot 13 = 143 > h_3(24, \mathcal{P}') = 2 \cdot 3 \cdot 19 = 114.$$

In § 4, we give an upper bound for  $h_j(n)$  which will be useful in § 6 where our proof of the increasingness of  $h_j$  is given. In (1.9),  $h_j(n)$  can be considered as the solution of a problem of optimization with prime variables. The upper bound of  $h_j(n)$  is obtained by relaxing some constraints so that certain variables are no longer primes, but only integers.

#### 1.4 Elementary computation of $h(n)$ and $h_j(n)$

The naive algorithm described in [5] to compute  $g(n)$  can be easily adapted to calculate  $h(n)$  for  $1 \leq n \leq N$ . Note that, for the prime factors of  $h(n)$ , Corollary 3.1 below furnishes the upper bound

$$P^+(h(n)) \leq p_{k(n)+1} + p_{k(n)+2}.$$

It also can be adapted to compute  $h_j(n)$ . For  $r \geq j \geq 1$  and  $n \geq \sigma_j$ , let us define

$$h_j^{(r)}(n) = \max_{\substack{P^+(M) \leq p_r, \ell(M) \leq n \\ \mu(M) \neq 0, \omega(M)=j}} M.$$

We have the induction relation

$$h_j^{(r+1)}(n) = \max(h_j^{(r)}(n), p_{r+1} h_{j-1}^{(r)}(n - p_{r+1})).$$

Indeed, either  $p_{r+1}$  does not divide  $h_j^{(r+1)}(n)$ , and  $h_j^{(r+1)}(n) = h_j^{(r)}(n)$  holds, or  $p_{r+1}$  divides  $h_j^{(r+1)}(n)$ , and  $h_j^{(r+1)}(n) = p_{r+1} h_{j-1}^{(r)}(n - p_{r+1})$ , which implies  $n \geq p_{r+1} + \sigma_{j-1}$ .

Moreover, if  $p_r \geq n$ , we have  $h_j^{(r)}(n) = h_j(n)$ ,  $h_r^{(r)}(n) = N_r$  and  $h_1^{(r)}(n) = \star(n)$  for  $n < p_r$  while, for  $n \geq p_r$ ,  $h_1^{(r)}(n) = p_r$  holds. So, we may write **algorithm 1**, which has been used to calculate the table in appendix. The merging and pruning method described in [5, §2.2] can be used to improve the running time.

In § 8, a more sophisticated algorithm to calculate  $h(n)$  is given. It is based on a fast method to compute  $\pi_{id}(x)$ , which is explained in § 7.

## 2 Some lemmas

**Lemma 2.1.** *If  $m \geq 2$  is an integer, let us denote by  $(m)^\star$  (resp.  $\star(m)$ ) the smallest (resp. largest) prime  $p$  satisfying  $p \geq m$  (resp.  $p \leq m$ ). Then*

$$(m)^\star \leq \frac{11}{8}m \quad \text{and} \quad \star(m) \geq \frac{7}{10}m$$

*hold.*

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**Algorithm 1** Computation of  $h_j(n)$  for  $2 \leq n \leq nmax$  and  $1 \leq j \leq k(n)$

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**Procedure** ComputeHj(nmax)

$r = 1$ ;  $p = p_r$ ;  $kmax = k(nmax)$ ;  $pmax = p_{kmax+1} + p_{kmax+2}$

**while**  $p \leq pmax$  **do**

**for**  $n$  from  $\sigma_r$  to  $nmax$  **do**

$H[r, n] = N_r$

$jmax = \min(r - 1, kmax)$

**for**  $j$  from  $jmax$  by  $-1$  to  $2$  **do**

**for**  $n$  from  $nmax$  by  $-1$  to  $p + \sigma_{j-1}$  **do**

$H[j, n] = \max(H[j, n], p * H[j - 1, n - p])$

**for**  $n$  from  $p$  to  $nmax$  **do**

$H[1, n] = p$ ;

$r = r + 1$ ;  $p = p_r$

---

*Proof.* We use the result of [6]: for  $x \geq 396738$ , the interval  $[x, x + \frac{x}{25 \log^2 x}]$  contains a prime number. As 396833 is prime, we deduce that, for  $p_i \geq 396833$ ,

$$(2.1) \quad \frac{p_{i+1}}{p_i} \leq 1 + \frac{1}{25 \log^2 p_i} \leq 1 + \frac{1}{25 \log^2 396833} < 1.00025 < \frac{11}{8} < \frac{10}{7}.$$

If  $m$  is prime,  $(m)^* = *(m) = m$  holds, while, if  $m$  is not prime, we define  $p_i$  by  $p_i < m < p_{i+1}$ ; we have  $(m)^* = p_{i+1}$ ,  $*(m) = p_i$ ,

$$\frac{(m)^*}{m} \leq \frac{p_{i+1}}{p_i + 1} < \frac{p_{i+1}}{p_i}, \quad \frac{*(m)}{m} \geq \frac{p_i}{p_{i+1} - 1} > \frac{p_i}{p_{i+1}}$$

and, if  $p_i \geq 396833$ , the result follows from (2.1). Finally, it remains to check that

$$\frac{p_{i+1}}{p_i + 1} \leq \frac{11}{8} \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{p_i}{p_{i+1} - 1} \geq \frac{7}{10}$$

hold for all  $p_i$ 's satisfying  $2 \leq p_i < 396833$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 2.2.** *Let  $p < p'$  be two primes. There exists a third prime  $p''$  satisfying*

$$(2.2) \quad p + p' \leq p'' \leq pp' - p + 1.$$

*Proof.* Let us show that  $p'' = (p + p')^*$  satisfies (2.2). By Lemma 2.1, it suffices to prove that  $\frac{11}{8}(p + p') \leq pp' - p + 1$ , i.e:

$$(2.3) \quad pp' \left( 8 - \frac{11}{p} - \frac{19}{p'} + \frac{8}{pp'} \right) \geq 0.$$

If  $p \geq 3$  and  $p' \geq 5$ , we have  $\frac{11}{p} + \frac{19}{p'} \leq \frac{11}{3} + \frac{19}{5} < 8$  and (2.3) holds. Similarly, if  $p = 2$  and  $p' \geq 11$ , the inequality  $\frac{11}{p} + \frac{19}{p'} \leq \frac{11}{2} + \frac{19}{11} < 8$  implies (2.3). In the three remaining cases,  $p = 2$  and  $p' \in \{3, 5, 7\}$ , it is easy to check that  $p'' = (p + p')^*$  satisfies (2.2).  $\square$

**Lemma 2.3.** *Let  $p$  and  $p'$  be two prime numbers satisfying  $3 \leq p < p'$  and  $pp' \neq 15$ . There exists a prime  $p''$  such that*

$$(2.4) \quad p + p' \leq p'' \leq \frac{5}{6}pp' - p.$$

*Proof.* The proof is similar to the one of the preceding lemma. From Lemma 2.1, to show that  $p'' = (p + p')^*$  satisfies (2.4), it suffices to show that  $\frac{11}{8}(p + p') \leq \frac{5}{6}pp' - p$ , i.e.  $33/p + 57/p' \leq 20$ , which evidently holds for  $p \geq 3$  and  $p' \geq 7$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 2.4.** *For all  $i \geq 2$ , the following inequality*

$$(2.5) \quad p_i + p_{i-1} \leq p_{2i-1}$$

*holds. Moreover, let  $b$  be a positive integer; there exists a positive integer  $i_0 = i_0(b)$  such that we have*

$$(2.6) \quad p_i + p_{i-1} < p_{2i-b} \quad \text{for } i \geq i_0(b).$$

*The table below gives some values of  $i_0(b)$*

$b =$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	18	30	3675
$i_0 =$	3	4	7	8	18	19	27	28	36	39	50	53	85	149	33127

*Proof.* We start from the two inequalities

$$(2.7) \quad p_i \leq i(\log i + \log \log i - \alpha), \quad (\alpha = 0.9484, i \geq 39017),$$

$$(2.8) \quad p_i \geq i(\log i + \log \log i - 1), \quad (i \geq 2)$$

which can be found in [7]. From (2.7), it follows that

$$(2.9) \quad p_{i-1} + p_i \leq (2i - 1)(\log i + \log \log i - \alpha), \quad (i \geq 39018)$$

while, if  $i \geq \max(2, b)$ , which implies  $2i - b \geq 2$  and  $i \geq b$ , (2.8) gives

$$(2.10) \quad p_{2i-b} \geq (2i - b)(\log i + \log 2 + \log \left( \frac{2i - b}{2i} \right) + \log \log i - 1).$$

By using the inequality  $\log t \leq t - 1$ , we get

$$\log \left( \frac{2i - b}{2i} \right) = -\log \left( \frac{2i}{2i - b} \right) \geq -\left( \frac{2i}{2i - b} - 1 \right) = -\frac{b}{2i - b}$$

and (2.10) yields

$$(2.11) \quad p_{2i-b} \geq (2i - b)(\log i + \log \log i + \log 2 - 1) - b.$$

Under the condition

$$(2.12) \quad i \geq \max(39018, b),$$

the subtraction of (2.9) from (2.11) gives

$$(2.13) \quad \begin{aligned} p_{2i-b} - p_{i-1} - p_i &\geq (\log i + \log \log i + \log 2)(1 - b) \\ &\quad + 2i(\log 2 - 1 + \alpha) - \log 2 - \alpha \\ &> (\log i + \log \log i + \log 2) \left[ \frac{1.283 i - 1.642}{\log i + \log \log i + \log 2} - (b - 1) \right]. \end{aligned}$$

Now, the two functions  $t \mapsto t/(\log t + \log \log t + \log 2)$  and  $t \mapsto -1/(\log t + \log \log t + \log 2)$  are increasing for  $t \geq e^2$ ; choosing  $i_1 = 39018$  and

$$(2.14) \quad b = \left\lfloor 1 + \frac{1.283 i_1 - 1.642}{\log i_1 + \log \log i_1 + \log 2} \right\rfloor = \lfloor 3675.52 \dots \rfloor = 3675$$

shows that, for  $i \geq i_1$ , (2.12) is satisfied and that in (2.13), the bracket is positive. Therefore, (2.13) proves  $p_i + p_{i-1} < p_{2i-3675}$  for  $i \geq i_1 = 39018$ .

To determine the entries of the table, for all  $i$ 's up to 39018, we have calculated  $b_i = 2i - 1 - \pi(p_i + p_{i-1})$  which is the smallest integer such that  $p_{i-1} + p_i < p_{2i-b_i}$ . Further, for each  $b$  in the table, we have determined  $i_0(b)$  which is the smallest integer  $i_0$  such that, for  $i_0(b) \leq i \leq 39018$ ,  $b_i \geq b$  holds.

As  $i_0(1) = 3$ , for all  $i \geq 3$ ,  $p_i + p_{i-1} < p_{2i-1}$  holds. So, (2.5) follows from  $p_2 + p_1 = 3 + 2 = 5 = p_3$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 2.5.** *Under Riemann hypothesis, for all  $x \geq 41$  we have*

$$(2.15) \quad |\pi_{id}(x) - \text{Li}(x^2)| \leq \frac{5}{24\pi} x^{3/2} \log x.$$

*Proof.* Let us define  $r(x)$  by  $\pi(x) = \text{Li}(x) + r(x)$  and assume the Riemann hypothesis. Then cf. [11, (6.18)] :

$$(2.16) \quad |r(x)| = |\pi(x) - \text{Li}(x)| \leq \frac{1}{8\pi} \sqrt{x} \log x \quad (\text{for } x \geq 2657).$$

Let us denote  $x_0 = 2657$ . Then, from (1.6), Stieltjes's integral gives :

$$\begin{aligned} \pi_{id}(x) &= \pi_{id}(x_0) + \int_{x_0^-}^x t \, d[\pi(t)] \\ &= \pi_{id}(x_0) + \int_{x_0}^x t \, d(\text{Li}(t)) + \int_{x_0^-}^x t \, d[r(t)] \\ &= \pi_{id}(x_0) + \text{Li}(x^2) - \text{Li}(x_0^2) + tr(t)|_{x_0}^x - \int_{x_0}^x r(t) \, dt. \end{aligned}$$

With (2.16), it comes

$$|\pi_{id}(x) - \text{Li}(x^2)| \leq |\pi_{id}(x_0) - \text{Li}(x_0^2) - x_0 r(x_0)| + \frac{x^{3/2} \log x}{8\pi} + \int_{x_0}^x \frac{\sqrt{t} \log t}{8\pi} \, dt$$



and, using  $\int \sqrt{t} \log t = \frac{2}{3} t^{3/2} \left( \log t - \frac{2}{3} \right)$ ,

$$(2.17) \quad \begin{aligned} |\pi_{id}(x) - \text{Li}(x^2)| &\leq \frac{5}{24\pi} x^{3/2} \log x - \frac{1}{18\pi} x^{3/2} \\ &\quad + |\pi_{id}(x_0) - \text{Li}(x_0^2) - x_0 r(x_0)| - \frac{1}{12\pi} x_0^{3/2} \log x_0 + \frac{1}{18\pi} x_0^{3/2}. \end{aligned}$$

The computation of

$$\begin{aligned} r(x_0) &= \pi(x_0) - \text{Li}(x_0) = 384 - 399.59681\dots = -15.59681\dots \\ \pi_{id}(x_0) - \text{Li}(x_0^2) &= 464\,653 - 480610.2863\dots = -15957.2863\dots \end{aligned}$$

and (2.17) imply for  $x \geq x_0$ ,

$$|\pi_{id}(x) - \text{Li}(x^2)| \leq \frac{5}{24\pi} x^{3/2} \log x - \frac{1}{18\pi} x^{3/2} - 740.023\dots \leq \frac{5}{24\pi} x^{3/2} \log x.$$

which proves (2.15) for  $x \geq x_0 = 2657$ . It remains to check (2.15) for  $41 \leq x \leq 2657$ ; by setting

$$f_1(x) = \text{Li}(x^2) - \frac{5}{24\pi} x^{3/2} \log x, \quad f_2(x) = \text{Li}(x^2) + \frac{5}{24\pi} x^{3/2} \log x,$$

it is equivalent to check

$$(2.18) \quad f_1(x) \leq \pi_{id}(x) \leq f_2(x)$$

for  $41 \leq x \leq 2657$ . One remarks that  $f_1$  and  $f_2$  are increasing for  $x \geq 2$ . Therefore, to prove (2.18), it suffices to check that for every prime  $p$  satisfying  $41 \leq p \leq 2657$  we have  $f_1(p') \leq \pi_{id}(x) \leq f_2(p)$  where  $p'$  is the prime following  $p$ .  $\square$

Note that, in the range  $[2..2657]$ ,  $\pi_{id}(x) - \text{Li}(x^2)$  has several changes of sign, the smallest one being for  $x = 110.35\dots$

**Lemma 2.6.** *Let  $z$  and  $u$  be two real numbers satisfying  $z \geq 1$  and  $\sqrt{z} \leq u \leq z$ . Suppose that we have precomputed the tables `prime`, `pifstab` and `pi`. The first two tables are indexed by the integers  $k$ ,  $0 \leq k \leq \pi(u)$ , and the third one by the integers  $t$ ,  $0 \leq t \leq u$ .*

- `prime[k]` contains  $p_k$  ( $p_0 = 1$ ).
- `pifstab[k]` contains  $\pi_f(p_k)$ .
- `pi[t]` contains  $\pi(t)$ .

Then the sum

$$(2.19) \quad \sum_{\sqrt{z} < q \leq u, q \text{ prime}} f(q) \pi_f \left( \frac{z}{q} \right)$$

may be computed in  $O(\sqrt{z}/\log z)$  time.

*Proof.* For  $q > \sqrt{z}$ ,  $z/q$  belongs to  $[1, \sqrt{z})$ . The number of primes in this interval is  $O(\sqrt{z}/\log z)$ , thus the number of values of  $\pi_f(z/q)$  is  $O(\sqrt{z}/\log z)$ . We group the  $q$ 's for which  $\pi_f(z/q)$  takes the same value. Algorithm 2 carries out this computation.

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**Algorithm 2 :** Computation of the sum (2.19) in  $O(\sqrt{z}/\log z)$  time

---

```

 $S = 0$ ;  $imin = 1 + \text{pi}[\lfloor \sqrt{z} \rfloor]$ 
while  $imin \leq \text{pi}[u]$  do
     $q = \text{prime}[imin]$ 
     $s = \text{pi}[z/q]$ 
     $imax = \min(\text{pi}(z/\text{prime}[s]), \text{pi}[u])$ 
     $S = S + (\text{pifab}[imax] - \text{pifab}[imin - 1]) * \text{pifab}[s]$ 
     $imin = imax + 1$ 
return  $S$ 

```

---

Let us give some words to convince of the correctness of algorithm 2 : let us note  $s = \pi(z/q)$ . Then  $p_s$  is the largest prime  $\leq z/q$ . For  $q'$  prime,  $q' \geq q$ , we have  $\pi_f(z/q') = \pi_f(p_s) = \text{pifab}[s]$  if and only if  $z/q' \geq p_s$  i.e.  $q' \leq z/p_s$ , in other terms,  $\pi(q') \leq \pi(z/p_s)$ . Thus the largest prime  $q'$  in the range  $[q..u]$  such that  $\pi_f(z/q') = \pi_f(p_s)$  is  $p_i$  where  $i = \min(\pi(z/p_s), \pi(u))$ .  $\square$

### 3 First results

**Proposition 3.1.** *Let  $j$  be a positive integer and  $\sigma_j$  and  $N_j$  be defined by (1.7). We have*

$$h(\sigma_j) = N_j.$$

*Proof.* It is easy to see that  $h(\sigma_1) = h(2) = 2 = N_1$  and  $h(\sigma_2) = h(5) = 6 = N_2$ . Now, we may suppose that  $j \geq 3$ , i.e.  $p_j \geq 5$  and we set  $\rho = p_j/\log p_j$ . The function  $t \mapsto t/\log t$  is increasing for  $t \geq e$  and, since  $2/\log 2 < 5/\log 5$ , we have, for  $1 \leq i < j$ ,  $p_i/\log p_i < \rho$  and for  $i > j$ ,  $p_i/\log p_i > \rho$ ; in other words,  $i - j$  and  $p_i/\log p_i - \rho$  have the same sign.

Let  $M$  be a product of  $r$  distinct primes,  $M = Q_1 Q_2 \dots Q_r$ , with  $r \geq 0$ . After a possible simplification by  $s$  primes ( $0 \leq s \leq \min(j, r)$ ), we may write

$$\frac{M}{N_j} = \frac{p_{j_1} p_{j_2} \dots p_{j_u}}{p_{k_1} p_{k_2} \dots p_{k_v}}$$

with  $u = r - s$ ,  $v = j - s$  and

$$p_{k_1} < p_{k_2} < \dots < p_{k_v} \leq p_j < p_{j_1} < p_{j_2} < \dots < p_{j_u}.$$

Let  $f(M) = \ell(M) - \rho \log M$ . From the definition of  $\ell$ , the function  $f$  is additive and we have

$$(3.1) \quad f(M) - f(N_j) = \sum_{i=1}^u (p_{j_i} - \rho \log p_{j_i}) - \sum_{i=1}^v (p_{k_i} - \rho \log p_{k_i}) \geq 0$$

since each term of the first sum is non-negative while, in the second sum, each term is non-positive.

From (1.1), since  $\ell(N_j) = \sigma_j$ , in order to prove that  $h(\sigma_j) = N_j$ , we must show that, for all squarefree number  $M$  satisfying  $\ell(M) \leq \sigma_j = \ell(N_j)$ , we have  $M \leq N_j$ . But, for such an  $M$ , (3.1) yields

$$f(M) = \ell(M) - \rho \log M \geq f(N_j) = \ell(N_j) - \rho \log N_j = \sigma_j - \rho \log N_j$$

whence

$$\frac{M}{N_j} \leq \exp \left( \frac{\ell(M) - \sigma_j}{\rho} \right) \leq 1,$$

which completes the proof of Proposition 3.1.  $\square$

**Proposition 3.2.** *Let  $r$  and  $j$  be two positive integers and  $\sigma_j$ ,  $N_j$  and  $h_j$  be defined by (1.7) and (1.9). We have*

$$(3.2) \quad h_j(\sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r) = N_{j+r}/N_r = p_{r+1}p_{r+2} \dots p_{r+j}.$$

Moreover, if  $n \geq \sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r$  we have

$$(3.3) \quad \ell(h_j(n)) \geq \sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r.$$

*Proof.* The proof is similar to the one of Proposition 3.1. Let us set

$$(3.4) \quad \rho = \frac{p_{j+r} - p_r}{\log(p_{j+r}/p_r)} \quad \text{and} \quad \rho' = \rho \log p_r - p_r.$$

Since, for  $t \neq 1$ ,  $(t-1)/t < \log t < t-1$  holds, we have  $p_{j+r} > \rho > p_r \geq 2$ . For a squarefree number  $M$ , we consider the additive function

$$f(M) = \ell(M) - \rho \log M + \rho' \omega(M) = \sum_{p|M} f(p) = \sum_{p|M} (p - \rho \log p + \rho').$$

We will prove that  $f$  attains its minimum in  $N = N_{j+r}/N_r$ . From (3.4), it follows that  $f(p_{j+r}) = f(p_r) = 0$  and the study of the function  $t \mapsto t - \rho \log t + \rho'$  shows that

$$f(p) \begin{cases} > 0 & \text{for } p < p_r \text{ or } p > p_{j+r} \\ < 0 & \text{for } p_r < p < p_{j+r} \\ = 0 & \text{for } p = p_r \text{ or } p = p_{j+r}. \end{cases}$$

Therefore, we have

$$(3.5) \quad f(M) - f(N) = \sum_{\substack{p|M \\ p < p_r \text{ or } p > p_{j+r}}} f(p) - \sum_{\substack{p \nmid M \\ p_r < p < p_{j+r}}} f(p) \geq 0.$$

From (1.9), we have to show that, for any squarefree integer  $M$  satisfying  $\ell(M) \leq \sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r = \ell(N)$  and  $\omega(M) = j = \omega(N)$ , we have  $M \leq N$ . For such an  $M$ , (3.5) gives

$$\ell(M) - \rho \log M + \rho' \omega(M) \geq \ell(N) - \rho \log N + \rho' \omega(N)$$

yielding

$$\frac{M}{N} \leq \exp \left( \frac{\ell(M) - \ell(N)}{\rho} \right) \leq 1,$$

which, together with  $\ell(N) = \sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r$ , proves (3.2).

To prove (3.3), first, from (1.9), we observe that  $h_j(n) \geq N = N_{j+r}/N_r$ . Setting  $M = h_j(n)$  in (3.5) and noting that  $\omega(M) = \omega(N) = j$ , we see that

$$\ell(M) \geq \ell(N) + \rho \log \frac{M}{N} \geq \ell(N) = \sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r$$

which proves (3.3).  $\square$

**Proposition 3.3.** *Let  $n \geq 2$  be an integer and  $p < p'$  two prime numbers which do not divide  $h(n)$ . Then the largest prime divisor  $P^+(h(n))$  of  $h(n)$  satisfies*

$$P^+(h(n)) < p + p'.$$

*Proof.* Let us assume that the set of prime factors of  $h(n)$  not smaller than  $p + p'$  is not empty and let  $q \geq p + p'$  be its smallest element.

- If  $q < pp'$ , by setting  $M = \frac{pp'}{q}h(n)$ , we have by (1.2)

$$\ell(M) = p + p' - q + \ell(h(n)) \leq \ell(h(n)) \leq n$$

and thus, from (1.1),

$$(3.6) \quad h(n) \geq M = \frac{pp'}{q}h(n),$$

in contradiction with  $q < pp'$ .

- If  $q > pp'$ , i.e.  $q \geq pp' + 1$ , by Lemma 2.2, the interval  $[p + p', q - p]$  contains a prime; thus the prime  $p'' = \star(q - p)$  satisfies  $p + p' \leq p'' \leq q - p < q$  and, from the definition of  $q$ ,  $p''$  does not divide  $h(n)$ . By Lemma 2.1,  $p'' = \star(q - p) \geq \frac{7}{10}(q - p)$  holds, whence

$$q \leq \frac{10}{7}p'' + p = \frac{pp''}{7} \left( \frac{10}{p} + \frac{7}{p''} \right).$$

We have  $p \geq 2$ ,  $p' \geq 3$  and  $p'' \geq p + p' \geq 5$ , so that  $\frac{10}{p} + \frac{7}{p''} \leq \frac{10}{2} + \frac{7}{5} < 7$ , yielding  $q < pp''$ . By considering  $M = \frac{pp''}{q}h(n)$ , as in (3.6), we get

$$h(n) \geq M = \frac{pp''}{q}h(n) > h(n),$$

a contradiction. □

**Corollary 3.1.** *If  $k = k(n)$  is defined by (1.8), the largest prime factor of  $h(n)$  satisfies*

$$P^+(h(n)) < p_{k+1} + p_{k+2}.$$

*Proof.* The number of prime factors of  $h(n)$  does not exceed  $k$ , so that, among  $p_1, p_2, \dots, p_{k+2}$  there are certainly two prime numbers  $p$  and  $p'$  not dividing  $h(n)$ . By applying Proposition 3.3, we get  $P^+(h(n)) < p + p' \leq p_{k+1} + p_{k+2}$ . □

**Proposition 3.4.** *Let  $n \geq 5$  be an integer,  $k \geq 2$  be defined by (1.8) and  $j$  an integer satisfying  $2 \leq j \leq k$ . Let us suppose that there exists two prime numbers,  $p, p'$  not dividing  $h_{j-1}(n)$ , and satisfying  $3 \leq p < p'$  and  $P^+(h_{j-1}(n)) \geq p + p'$  where  $P^+(h_{j-1}(n))$  is the largest prime divisor of  $h_{j-1}(n)$ . Then the inequality*

$$h_j(n) > \frac{6}{5}h_{j-1}(n)$$

*holds.*

*Proof.* Let us consider two cases :

**Case 1 :**  $pp' > 15$ . Let us denote by  $q \leq P^+(h_{j-1}(n))$  the smallest prime dividing  $h_{j-1}(n)$  and satisfying  $p + p' \leq q$ .

- If  $q < \frac{5}{6}pp'$ , we set  $M = \frac{pp'}{q}h_{j-1}(n)$ ; we have  $\omega(M) = j$  and  $\ell(M) = p + p' - q + \ell(h_{j-1}(n)) \leq \ell(h_{j-1}(n))$  so that, from (1.12),  $\ell(M) \leq n$  holds and (1.9) yields

$$(3.7) \quad h_j(n) \geq M > \frac{6}{5}h_{j-1}(n)$$

as required.

- If  $q \geq \frac{5}{6}pp'$ , we set  $p'' = *(q - p)$ ; from Lemma 2.3,  $p + p' \leq p'' \leq q - p < q$  holds, and, from the definition of  $q$ ,  $p''$  does not divide  $h_{j-1}(n)$ .

By Lemma 2.1, we get  $p'' = \star(q - p) \geq \frac{7}{10}(q - p)$ , which implies

$$q \leq \frac{10}{7}p'' + p = \frac{pp''}{7} \left( \frac{10}{p} + \frac{7}{p''} \right).$$

But  $p \geq 3$ ,  $p' \geq 7$ ,  $p'' \geq p + p' \geq 10$ , thus  $p'' \geq 11$ , and  $\frac{10}{p} + \frac{7}{p''} \leq \frac{10}{3} + \frac{7}{11} < \frac{35}{6}$ , yielding  $q < \frac{5}{6}pp''$ . By setting  $M = \frac{pp''}{q}h_{j-1}(n)$ , as in (3.7), we get  $h_j(n) \geq M > \frac{6}{5}h_{j-1}(n)$ .

**Case 2 :**  $p = 3$ ,  $p' = 5$ .

- If  $P^+(h_{j-1}(n)) \leq 13$ , which implies  $n \leq \pi_{id}(13) = 41$ , examining the table of Fig. 1 shows that, for  $n \leq 41$ , we have  $h_j(n) \geq \frac{6}{5}h_{j-1}(n)$  with equality if and only if  $h_{j-1}(n) = 5, 35, 385$  or  $5005$ .
- If  $P^+(h_{j-1}(n)) \geq 17$ , and 11 does not divide  $P^+(h_{j-1}(n))$ , then we apply case 1 with  $p = 3$ ,  $p' = 11$ , while, if 11 divides  $P^+(h_{j-1}(n))$ ,  $h_j(n) \geq \frac{3 \cdot 5}{11}h_{j-1}(n) > \frac{6}{5}h_{j-1}(n)$  holds.

□

## 4 Bounding $h_j(n)$

**Proposition 4.1.** *Let  $j \geq 1$  and  $n \geq \sigma_j$  (where  $\sigma_j$  has been introduced in (1.7)) be two integers; we define  $r \geq 0$  by*

$$(4.1) \quad \sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r \leq n < \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_{r+1}$$

and  $n'$  by

$$(4.2) \quad 0 \leq n' = n - (\sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r) < p_{j+r+1} - p_{r+1}.$$

Then we have

$$(4.3) \quad h_j(n) \leq p_{r+1}p_{r+2} \dots p_{r+j} \frac{p_{j+r+1}}{p_{j+r+1} - n'} = \frac{N_{j+r+1}}{N_r(p_{j+r+1} - n')}.$$

*Proof.* From its definition (1.9),  $h_j(n)$  is a product of  $j$  primes. Let us denote by  $A_1, A_2, \dots, A_u$  (with  $0 \leq u \leq j$ ) its prime factors exceeding  $p_{j+r+1}$  and by  $B_1, B_2, \dots, B_{r+1+u}$  the primes  $\leq p_{j+r+1}$  and not dividing  $h_j(n)$ ; we have

$$(4.4) \quad h_j(n) = \frac{N_{j+r+1}A_1A_2 \dots A_u}{B_1B_2 \dots B_{r+1+u}}$$

(where the product  $A_1A_2 \dots A_u$  should be replaced by 1 when  $u = 0$ ) and

$$(4.5) \quad 2 \leq B_1 < \dots < B_{r+1+u} \leq p_{j+r+1} < p_{j+r+2} \leq A_1 < \dots < A_u.$$

Further, let us introduce  $\nu = \ell(h_j(n))$ ; by (1.12) and (4.1), we have

$$(4.6) \quad \nu \leq n < \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_{r+1}$$

and it follows from Proposition 3.2, (3.3), that

$$(4.7) \quad \nu = \ell(h_j(n)) \geq \sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r.$$

Moreover, (4.4) implies

$$(4.8) \quad \nu = \ell(h_j(n)) = \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r + \sum_{i=1}^u (A_i - B_{r+1+i}) - \sum_{i=1}^r (B_i - p_i) - B_{r+1}.$$

Now, we consider the optimization problem (where  $\nu, r, u, A_1, A_2, \dots, A_u$  are fixed)

$$(4.9) \quad \mathcal{M} = \max_{\underline{Z} \in \mathcal{D}} \frac{A_1 A_2 \dots A_u}{f(\underline{Z})}$$

where  $\mathcal{D}$  is a subset of  $\mathbb{N}^{r+1+u}$ ,  $\underline{Z} = (Z_1, Z_2, \dots, Z_{r+1+u})$ ,

$$f(\underline{Z}) = Z_1 Z_2 \dots Z_{r+1+u}$$

and the set  $\mathcal{D}$  is defined by

$$(4.10) \quad Z_i \geq p_i, \quad (1 \leq i \leq r+1),$$

$$(4.11) \quad Z_i < Z_{r+1}, \quad (1 \leq i \leq r),$$

$$(4.12) \quad Z_{r+1} < Z_{r+1+i} \leq A_i, \quad (1 \leq i \leq u)$$

and

$$(4.13) \quad U(\underline{Z}) - R(\underline{Z}) - Z_{r+1} + \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r = \nu$$

with

$$(4.14) \quad U(\underline{Z}) = \sum_{i=1}^u (A_i - Z_{r+1+i}), \quad R(\underline{Z}) = \sum_{i=1}^r (Z_i - p_i).$$

Note that, from (4.5) and (4.8),  $\underline{B} \in \mathcal{D}$  so that (4.4) implies

$$(4.15) \quad \frac{h_j(n)}{N_{j+r+1}} = \frac{A_1 A_2 \dots A_u}{f(\underline{B})} \leq \mathcal{M} = \max_{\underline{Z} \in \mathcal{D}} \frac{A_1 A_2 \dots A_u}{f(\underline{Z})}.$$

If  $\underline{Z} \in \mathcal{D}$ , from (4.10), (4.11) and (4.12), it follows that

$$2 = p_1 \leq Z_i \leq A_u, \quad 1 \leq i \leq r+1+u$$

so that  $f(\underline{Z})$  does not vanish on  $\mathcal{D}$  and  $\mathcal{D}$  is finite. Therefore, the maximum  $\mathcal{M}$  defined by (4.9) is finite; let  $\underline{C}$  be a point in  $\mathcal{D}$  where the maximum  $\mathcal{M}$  is attained. We shall prove that

$$(4.16) \quad U(\underline{C}) = R(\underline{C}) = 0.$$

For that, first we claim that one of the two numbers  $U(\underline{C}), R(\underline{C})$  vanishes. Indeed, assume that  $U(\underline{C}) \neq 0$  and  $R(\underline{C}) \neq 0$ . From (4.10), we have  $R(\underline{C}) > 0$ ; thus there exists  $i_0, 1 \leq i_0 \leq r$ , such that

$$(4.17) \quad C_{i_0} \geq p_{i_0} + 1 > p_{i_0}.$$

Similarly, from (4.12), we have  $U(\underline{C}) > 0$ , and there exists  $i_1, 1 \leq i_1 \leq u$  such that

$$(4.18) \quad A_{i_1} > A_{i_1} - 1 \geq C_{r+1+i_1}.$$

Let us define  $\underline{C}' \in \mathbb{N}^{r+1+u}$  by

$$C'_{i_0} = C_{i_0} - 1, \quad C'_{r+1+i_1} = C_{r+1+i_1} + 1, \quad C'_i = C_i \quad \text{for } i \neq i_0, r+1+i_1.$$

To prove that  $\underline{C}' \in \mathcal{D}$ , we have to check that  $C'_{i_0} \geq p_{i_0}$  (which follows from (4.17)), that  $C'_{i_0} < C_{r+1}$  (which follows from  $C'_{i_0} = C_{i_0} - 1 < C_{r+1} - 1$ ), that  $C_{r+1} < C'_{r+1+i_1}$  (since  $C_{r+1} < C_{r+1+i_1}$  and  $C_{r+1+i_1} = C'_{r+1+i_1} - 1$ ), that  $C'_{r+1+i_1} \leq A_{i_1}$  (which follows from (4.18)) and that  $U(\underline{C}') - R(\underline{C}') = U(\underline{C}) - R(\underline{C})$  (which follows from  $U(\underline{C}') = U(\underline{C}) - 1$  and  $R(\underline{C}') = R(\underline{C}) - 1$ ). Further, we have

$$(4.19) \quad \begin{aligned} \frac{f(\underline{C}')}{f(\underline{C})} &= \frac{C'_{i_0} C'_{r+1+i_1}}{C_{i_0} C_{r+1+i_1}} = \frac{(C_{i_0} - 1)(C_{r+1+i_1} + 1)}{C_{i_0} C_{r+1+i_1}} \\ &= 1 - \frac{(C_{r+1+i_1} - C_{i_0} + 1)}{C_{i_0} C_{r+1+i_1}} < 1 \end{aligned}$$

since, from the definition of  $\mathcal{D}$  (cf. (4.11) and (4.12)),  $C_{i_0} < C_{r+1} < C_{r+1+i_1}$  holds. But (4.19) contradicts the fact that the maximum in (4.9) is attained at  $\underline{C}$ .

Let us show now that it is impossible to have simultaneously  $U(\underline{C}) > 0$  and  $R(\underline{C}) = 0$ ; indeed, let us assume that  $U(\underline{C}) \geq 1$  and  $R(\underline{C}) = 0$  (which implies  $r = 0$  or  $C_i = p_i$  for  $1 \leq i \leq r$ ). We define  $i_1$  as in (4.18). Since  $\underline{C} \in \mathcal{D}$ , we get from (4.13)

$$C_{r+1} = \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r - \nu + U(\underline{C}) = (\sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_{r+1} - \nu) + p_{r+1} + U(\underline{C})$$

which, by (4.6) and  $U(\underline{C}) \geq 1$ , yield

$$(4.20) \quad C_{r+1} > p_{r+1} + U(\underline{C}) \geq p_{r+1} + 1.$$



We define  $\underline{C}' \in \mathbb{N}^{r+1+u}$  by

$$C'_{r+1} = C_{r+1} - 1, \quad C'_{r+1+i_1} = C_{r+1+i_1} + 1, \quad C'_i = C_i \quad \text{for } i \neq r+1, r+1+i_1.$$

To prove that  $\underline{C}' \in \mathcal{D}$ , we have to check that  $C'_i \geq p_i$  for  $1 \leq i \leq r+1$  (which follows from  $C'_i = C_i = p_i$  if  $i \leq r$  and from (4.20) if  $i = r+1$ ), that  $C'_i < C'_{r+1}$  for  $1 \leq i \leq r$  (which follows from  $C'_i = C_i = p_i \leq p_r$  and from  $C'_{r+1} = C_{r+1} - 1 \geq p_{r+1}$ , via (4.20)), that  $C'_{r+1} < C'_{r+1+i}$  for  $1 \leq i \leq u$  (which follows from  $C'_{r+1} < C_{r+1}$  and  $C'_{r+1+i} \geq C_{r+1+i}$ ), that  $C'_{r+1+i_1} \leq A_{i_1}$  (which follows from (4.18)) and that  $U(\underline{C}') - C'_{r+1} = U(\underline{C}) - C_{r+1}$  (which is easy). As in (4.19), we have  $f(\underline{C}') < f(\underline{C})$ , contradicting the fact that the maximum in (4.9) is attained at  $\underline{C}$ .

To prove (4.16), it remains to show that we cannot have  $R(\underline{C}) > 0$  and  $U(\underline{C}) = 0$ . Let us suppose that  $R(\underline{C}) \geq 1$  and  $U(\underline{C}) = 0$ , which implies  $u = 0$  or, for  $1 \leq i \leq u$ ,

$$(4.21) \quad C_{r+1+i} = A_i \geq p_{j+r+2} \geq p_{j+r+1} + 2,$$

with the help of (4.5). From (4.13) and (4.7), this time we get

$$(4.22) \quad \begin{aligned} C_{r+1} = \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r - \nu - R(\underline{C}) &\leq \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r - (\sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r) - R(\underline{C}) \\ &= p_{j+r+1} - R(\underline{C}) \leq p_{j+r+1} - 1. \end{aligned}$$

Here we choose  $i_0$  as in (4.17) and set

$$C'_{i_0} = C_{i_0} - 1, \quad C'_{r+1} = C_{r+1} + 1, \quad C'_i = C_i \quad \text{for } i \neq i_0, r+1.$$

To prove that  $\underline{C}' \in \mathcal{D}$ , we have to check that  $C'_{i_0} \geq p_{i_0}$  (which follows from (4.17)), that  $C'_{r+1} \geq p_{r+1}$  (which follows from  $C'_{r+1} = C_{r+1} + 1$  and  $C_{r+1} \geq p_{r+1}$ ), that, for  $1 \leq i \leq r$ ,  $C'_i < C'_{r+1}$  (which follows from  $C'_i \leq C_i$  and  $C'_{r+1} > C_{r+1}$ ), that, for  $1 \leq i \leq u$ ,  $C'_{r+1} < C_{r+1+i_1} = A_{i_1}$  (which follows from (4.21) and (4.22)) and that  $R(\underline{C}') + C'_{r+1} = R(\underline{C}) + C_{r+1}$  (which is easy). As precedingly in (4.19), we observe that  $f(\underline{C}') < f(\underline{C})$ , contradicting the fact that the minimum is attained at  $\underline{C}$ .

In conclusion, we have proved (4.16) so that  $C_i = p_i$  for  $1 \leq i \leq r$  and  $C_{r+1+i} = A_i$  for  $1 \leq i \leq u$ . Moreover, (4.6) yields  $\nu \leq n$ , and, from (4.13) and (4.2), we get

$$C_{r+1} = \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r - \nu \geq \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r - n = p_{j+r+1} - n'.$$

Therefore, the maximum  $\mathcal{M}$  in (4.9) satisfies

$$\mathcal{M} = \frac{A_1 A_2 \dots A_u}{p_1 p_2 \dots p_r C_{r+1} A_1 A_2 \dots A_u} \leq \frac{1}{p_1 p_2 \dots p_r (p_{j+r+1} - n')}$$

which, via (4.15), proves (4.3).  $\square$

**Proposition 4.2.** *With the notation of Proposition 4.1, we have*

$$(4.23) \quad h_j(n) \geq \frac{N_{j+r+1}}{N_r(p_{j+r+1} - n')^*} = \frac{N_{j+r+1}}{qN_r}$$

where  $q = (p_{j+r+1} - n')^*$  is the smallest prime satisfying  $q \geq p_{j+r+1} - n'$ .

*Proof.* From (4.2), we have  $p_{r+1} < p_{j+r+1} - n' \leq p_{j+r+1}$  which implies  $p_{r+1} \leq q \leq p_{j+r+1}$  so that  $M = N_{j+r+1}/(qN_r)$  is an integer with exactly  $j$  prime factors. Further, by (4.2), we have

$$\ell(M) = \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r - q \leq \sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r - (p_{j+r+1} - n') = n$$

and, by (1.9),  $h_j(n) \geq M$  holds.  $\square$

**Corollary 4.1.** *We keep the notation of Proposition 4.1; if  $q = p_{j+r+1} - n'$  is prime then*

$$(4.24) \quad h_j(n) = h_j(\sigma_{j+r+1} - \sigma_r - q) = \frac{N_{j+r+1}}{qN_r}.$$

*Proof.* Corollary 4.1 follows from Propositions 4.1 and 4.2.  $\square$

## 5 A parity phenomenon

**Proposition 5.1.** *Let  $k \geq 2$  be an integer and  $a$  be an even number satisfying  $4 \leq a < p_{k+1}$  and  $h_k$  defined by (1.9). We have*

$$(5.1) \quad h_k(\sigma_{k+1} - a) = h_k(\sigma_{k+1} - a - 1).$$

*Proof.* Since  $n \mapsto h_k(n)$  is non-decreasing, we have

$$(5.2) \quad h_k(\sigma_{k+1} - a) \geq h_k(\sigma_{k+1} - a - 1).$$

Let us set  $n = \sigma_{k+1} - a$  and note that  $n$  satisfies  $\sigma_k < n < \sigma_{k+1}$  so that, from (1.8),  $k = k(n) = k(n-1)$ . Let  $M$  be a positive squarefree integer such that  $\ell(M) \leq n$  and  $\omega(M) = k$ . Such a number  $M$  is even; if not, we would have  $\ell(M) \geq 3 + 5 + \dots + p_{k+1} = \sigma_{k+1} - 2$  in contradiction with  $\ell(M) \leq n = \sigma_{k+1} - a \leq \sigma_{k+1} - 4$ . Therefore,  $\ell(M)$  is the sum of 2 and  $k-1$  odd numbers, so that  $\ell(M) \equiv \sigma_k \equiv \sigma_{k+1} + 1 \equiv \sigma_{k+1} - a - 1 \pmod{2}$ . So,  $\ell(M)$  cannot be equal to  $\sigma_{k+1} - a$  and  $\ell(M) \leq \sigma_{k+1} - a - 1$  holds. Thus, from (1.9), we get  $h_k(\sigma_{k+1} - a) \leq h_k(\sigma_{k+1} - a - 1)$ , which, with (5.2), proves (5.1).  $\square$

**Proposition 5.2.** *Let  $k$  be an integer,  $k \geq 2$ , and  $q$  a prime number satisfying  $3 \leq q \leq p_k$ . By setting  $m = \sigma_{k+1} - q - 1$ , we have*

$$(5.3) \quad h_{k-1}(m) = h_{k-1}(m-1) = h_{k-1}(\sigma_{k+1} - q - 2) = \frac{N_{k+1}}{2q}.$$

*Proof.* From the table of Figure 1, we have  $h_1(6) = h_1(5) = 5$ ,  $h_2(11) = h_2(10) = 21$  and  $h_2(13) = h_2(12) = 35$  so that the proposition is true for  $k = 2$ ,  $q = 3$  and for  $k = 3$  and  $q = 3$  or  $5$ . So, from now on, we assume  $k \geq 4$ . Corollary 4.1 with  $j = k - 1$ ,  $r = 1$  implies  $h_{k-1}(m - 1) = N_{k+1}/(2q)$  and, since  $n \mapsto h_{k-1}(n)$  is non-decreasing, it follows that

$$(5.4) \quad h_{k-1}(m) \geq h_{k-1}(m - 1) = \frac{N_{k+1}}{2q}.$$

Let  $M$  be a positive squarefree integer satisfying  $\ell(M) \leq m$  and  $\omega(M) = k - 1$ . In view of (5.4) and (1.9), to prove that  $h_{k-1}(m) = N_{k+1}/(2q)$ , it suffices to show that

$$(5.5) \quad M \leq \frac{N_{k+1}}{2q}.$$

If  $M$  is odd,  $\ell(M)$  is the sum of  $k - 1$  odd numbers, which implies

$$\ell(M) \equiv \sigma_k \equiv \sigma_{k+1} - q = m + 1 \pmod{2}.$$

So,  $\ell(M)$  cannot be equal to  $m$ ; since, by (1.9),  $\ell(M) \leq m$  holds, we should have  $\ell(M) \leq m - 1$ ; therefore, from (1.9), we get

$$(5.6) \quad M \leq h_{k-1}(m - 1) = \frac{N_{k+1}}{2q}.$$

If  $M$  is even, we have  $\omega(M/2) = k - 2$  and  $\ell(M/2) \leq m - 2$ , so that

$$(5.7) \quad M \leq 2h_{k-2}(m - 2).$$

- If  $q \geq 11$ , since we have assumed  $k \geq 4$ , i.e.  $p_{k+1} \geq 11$ , we have

$$\sigma_k - 5 \leq m - 2 = \sigma_{k+1} - q - 3 \leq \sigma_{k+1} - 14 < \sigma_{k+1} - 10.$$

By Proposition 4.1 with  $j = k - 2$ ,  $r = 2$ ,  $n = m - 2$ ,  $n' = n - (\sigma_k - \sigma_2) = p_{k+1} - q + 2$ , we get

$$h_{k-2}(m - 2) \leq \frac{N_{k+1}}{6(q - 2)}$$

which, by (5.7), gives

$$(5.8) \quad M \leq \frac{N_{k+1}}{3(q - 2)} = \frac{N_{k+1}}{3q} \frac{q}{q - 2} \leq \frac{N_{k+1}}{3q} \frac{11}{9} < \frac{N_{k+1}}{2q}.$$

- If  $q \in \{3, 5, 7\}$ , since  $k \geq 4$  and  $p_{k+2} \geq p_6 = 13$ , we have

$$\sigma_{k+1} - 10 \leq m - 2 = \sigma_{k+1} - q - 3 \leq \sigma_{k+1} - 6 < \sigma_{k+2} - 17.$$

and Proposition 4.1 with  $j = k - 2$ ,  $r = 3$ ,  $n = m - 2$  and  $n' = n - (\sigma_{k+1} - 10) = 7 - q$  yields

$$(5.9) \quad h_{k-2}(m-2) \leq \frac{N_{k+2}}{30(p_{k+2} + q - 7)}.$$

Using  $q \leq 7$ ,  $k \geq 4$  and  $p_{k+2} \geq p_6 = 13$  gives

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{N_{k+2}}{30(p_{k+2} + q - 7)} &= \frac{N_{k+1}}{30} \frac{p_{k+2}}{p_{k+2} + q - 7} \leq \frac{N_{k+1}}{30} \frac{13}{q + 6} \\ &= \frac{13N_{k+1}}{30q} \frac{q}{q + 6} \leq \frac{13N_{k+1}}{30q} \frac{7}{13} < \frac{N_{k+1}}{4q} \end{aligned}$$

which, together with (5.7) and (5.9), proves

$$(5.10) \quad M < \frac{N_{k+1}}{2q}.$$

Inequalities (5.6), (5.8) and (5.10) prove that (5.5) holds, which, with (5.4), completes the proof of (5.3). □

**Proposition 5.3.** *Let  $k$  be a positive integer and  $m = \sigma_{k+1} - 1$ ; we have*

$$(5.11) \quad h_k(m) = h_k(m-1) = h_k(\sigma_{k+1} - 2) = \frac{N_{k+1}}{2}.$$

*Proof.* It is the same proof than for Proposition 5.2. By Proposition 3.2 with  $j = k$  and  $r = 1$ , we have

$$h_k(m) \geq h_k(m-1) = \frac{N_{k+1}}{2}.$$

Further, let  $M$  be a positive integer satisfying  $\ell(M) \leq m$  and  $\omega(M) = k$ . If  $M$  is odd, by the parity phenomenon, we have  $\ell(M) \equiv m - 1 \pmod{2}$  so that  $\ell(M) \leq m - 1$  and  $M \leq h_k(m-1) = \frac{N_{k+1}}{2}$ . If  $M$  is even, we have  $M \leq 2h_{k-1}(\sigma_{k+1} - 3)$  and, if  $k \geq 2$ , i.e.  $p_{k+2} \geq 7$ , Proposition 4.1 with  $j = k - 1$ ,  $r = 2$ ,  $n = \sigma_{k+1} - 3$ ,  $n' = 2$ , yields

$$M \leq 2 \frac{N_{k+2}}{6(p_{k+2} - 2)} = \frac{N_{k+1}}{3} \frac{p_{k+2}}{p_{k+2} - 2} \leq \frac{7N_{k+1}}{15} < \frac{N_{k+1}}{2}.$$

If  $k = 1$ , it is easy to check that (5.11) still holds. □

## 6 The increasingness of $h_j(n)$ on $j$

**Theorem 6.1.** *Let  $n \geq 2$  be an integer and  $k = k(n)$  be defined by (1.8); for  $j$  satisfying  $1 \leq j \leq k$ , we have*

$$(6.1) \quad h_{j-1}(n) \leq \frac{5}{6} h_j(n)$$

and (6.1) is an equality if and only if  $j = k(n) \geq 2$  and  $n = \sigma_{j+1} - 4$  or  $n = \sigma_{j+1} - 5$ .

*Proof.* If  $j = 1$ , it follows from (1.10) and (1.11) that  $h_0(n) = 1$ ,  $h_1(n) = \star(n) \geq 2$  and  $h_0(n)/h_1(n) \leq 1/2 < 5/6$ , which proves (6.1). So, from now on, we assume  $j \geq 2$ .

The sequence  $(\sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r)_{r \geq 0}$  is increasing and goes to infinity. So, we may define  $r_j \geq 0$  and  $n'_j$  by

$$(6.2) \quad \sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j} \leq n < \sigma_{j+r_j+1} - \sigma_{r_j+1}$$

and

$$(6.3) \quad n'_j = n - (\sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j}).$$

We shall consider four cases :  $r_j \leq j - 4$ ,  $r_j \geq j + 3$ ,  $j - 3 \leq r_j \leq j + 2$  and  $j \geq 25$ ,  $j - 3 \leq r_j \leq j + 2$  and  $j \leq 24$ .

### First case : $r_j \leq j - 4$

From (2.5) and our hypothesis  $j \geq r_j + 4$ , we deduce

$$(6.4) \quad p_{r_j+1} + p_{r_j+2} \leq p_{2r_j+3} < p_{j+r_j} < p_{j+r_j+1}$$

and

$$(6.5) \quad p_{r_j+2} + p_{r_j+3} \leq p_{2r_j+5} < p_{j+r_j+2}.$$

Let us set From (6.2), we get

$$(6.6) \quad 0 \leq n'_j = n - (\sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j}) < p_{j+r_j+1} - p_{r_j+1}$$

and applying Proposition 4.2 yield

$$(6.7) \quad h_j(n) \geq \frac{N_{j+r_j+1}}{qN_{r_j}} = \frac{N_{j+r_j+1}}{N_{r_j}(p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j)^\star}.$$

In view of bounding  $h_{j-1}(n)$ , we have to determine  $r_{j-1}$  such that

$$(6.8) \quad \sigma_{j-1+r_{j-1}} - \sigma_{r_{j-1}} \leq n < \sigma_{j+r_{j-1}} - \sigma_{r_{j-1}+1}.$$

We shall distinguish two sub cases.

**Sub case one,**  $r_{j-1} = r_j + 1$

Let us assume that

$$(6.9) \quad \sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j} \leq n < \sigma_{j+r_j+1} - \sigma_{r_j+2}.$$

i.e. from (6.3),

$$(6.10) \quad 0 \leq n'_j = n - (\sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j}) < p_{j+r_j+1} - p_{r_j+1} - p_{r_j+2}.$$

Note that, from (6.4), the right hand side of (6.10) is positive. Then, we have  $r_{j-1} = r_j + 1$  since, from (6.9),

$$\begin{aligned} \sigma_{(j-1)+(r_j+1)} - \sigma_{r_j+1} &= \sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j+1} < \sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j} \leq n \\ &< \sigma_{j+r_j+1} - \sigma_{r_j+2} = \sigma_{(j-1)+(r_j+1)+1} - \sigma_{(r_j+1)+1} \end{aligned}$$

holds. Via (6.3), this implies that

$$n'_{j-1} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} n - (\sigma_{j-1+r_{j-1}} - \sigma_{r_{j-1}}) = n - \sigma_{j+r_j} + \sigma_{r_j+1} = n'_j + p_{r_j+1}.$$

Applying Proposition 4.1 and noting that  $j-1+r_{j-1} = j+r_j$  yield

$$h_{j-1}(n) \leq \frac{N_{j-1+r_{j-1}+1}}{N_{r_{j-1}}(p_{j-1+r_{j-1}+1} - n'_{j-1})} = \frac{N_{j+r_j+1}}{N_{r_j+1}(p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j - p_{r_j+1})}.$$

By using (6.7), we get

$$(6.11) \quad \frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} \leq \frac{(p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j)^*}{p_{r_j+1}(p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j - p_{r_j+1})}.$$

From (6.6), we have  $p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j > p_{r_j+1} \geq p_1 = 2$ , so that we may apply Lemma 2.1 which, with the help of (6.11) and (6.10), yields

$$\frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} \leq \frac{11}{8p_{r_j+1}} \left( 1 + \frac{p_{r_j+1}}{p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j - p_{r_j+1}} \right) < \frac{11}{8} \left( \frac{1}{p_{r_j+1}} + \frac{1}{p_{r_j+2}} \right).$$

If  $r_j \geq 1$ ,  $\frac{11}{8} \left( \frac{1}{p_{r_j+1}} + \frac{1}{p_{r_j+2}} \right) \leq \frac{11}{8} \left( \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{5} \right) < \frac{5}{6}$ , which proves (6.1).

It remains to consider the case  $r_j = 0$ , which, from (6.9) and (1.8), implies  $\sigma_j \leq n < \sigma_{j+1}$  and  $k(n) = j$ .

(6.10) becomes  $0 \leq n'_j = n - \sigma_j < p_{j+1} - 5$  and, by setting  $a = p_{j+1} - n'_j$ , we get

$$(6.12) \quad 5 < a = p_{j+1} - n'_j = p_{j+1} + \sigma_j - n = \sigma_{j+1} - n < p_{j+1}$$

while (6.11) yields

$$(6.13) \quad \frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} \leq \frac{(a)^*}{2(a-2)}.$$

By Lemma 2.1,  $(a)^* \leq \frac{11}{8}a$  holds, and, for  $a \geq 12$ ,  $\frac{11}{16} \frac{a}{a-2} \leq \frac{11}{16} \frac{12}{10} < \frac{5}{6}$ , which, via (6.13), proves (6.1).

Since, from (6.12),  $a > 5$ , it remains to study the cases  $6 \leq a \leq 11$ . If  $a = 7, 9, 10, 11$ , it is easy to check that  $\frac{(a)^*}{2(a-2)} < \frac{5}{6}$ .

If  $a = 6$  or  $a = 8$ , by Proposition 5.1, (6.12) and (4.23) we have

$$h_j(n) = h_j(\sigma_{j+1} - a) = h_j(\sigma_{j+1} - a - 1) = h_j(n - 1) \geq \frac{N_{j+1}}{(a+1)^*}$$

while, by Proposition 5.2, since  $a - 1$  is prime, we get

$$h_{j-1}(n) = h_{j-1}(n - 1) = \frac{N_{j+1}}{2(a-1)}$$

yielding

$$\frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} = \frac{h_{j-1}(n-1)}{h_j(n-1)} \leq \frac{(a+1)^*}{2(a-1)} = \begin{cases} 7/10 & \text{if } a = 6 \\ 11/14 & \text{if } a = 8 \end{cases}$$

and, in both cases,  $\frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} < \frac{5}{6}$  holds, which proves (6.1).

**Sub case two,**  $r_{j-1} = r_j + 2$

Now, we assume that (6.2) holds but not (6.9); thus we have

$$(6.14) \quad \sigma_{j+r_j+1} - \sigma_{r_j+2} \leq n < \sigma_{j+r_j+1} - \sigma_{r_j+1}$$

and, from (6.5),

$$(6.15) \quad p_{j+r_j+1} - p_{r_j+1} - p_{r_j+2} \leq n'_j < p_{j+r_j+1} - p_{r_j+1}.$$

Here, we get  $r_{j-1} = r_j + 2$ , since we have

$$\sigma_{j-1+r_j+2} - \sigma_{r_j+2} \leq n < \sigma_{j+r_j+1} - \sigma_{r_j+1} < \sigma_{j+r_j+2} - \sigma_{r_j+3}$$

by observing that, from (6.5),

$$\sigma_{j+r_j+2} - \sigma_{r_j+3} - (\sigma_{j+r_j+1} - \sigma_{r_j+1}) = p_{j+r_j+2} - p_{r_j+2} - p_{r_j+3} > 0$$

holds. Now, we have

$$(6.16) \quad \begin{aligned} 0 \leq n'_{j-1} &= n - (\sigma_{j-1+r_{j-1}} - \sigma_{r_{j-1}}) = n - \sigma_{j+r_j+1} + \sigma_{r_j+2} \\ &= n'_j + \sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j} - \sigma_{j+r_j+1} + \sigma_{r_j+2} && \text{from (6.6)} \\ &= n'_j - p_{j+r_j+1} + p_{r_j+1} + p_{r_j+2} < p_{r_j+2} && \text{from (6.15)} \end{aligned}$$

and applying Proposition 4.1 gives

$$h_{j-1}(n) \leq \frac{N_{j-1+r_{j-1}+1}}{N_{r_{j-1}}(p_{j-1+r_{j-1}+1} - n'_{j-1})} = \frac{N_{j+r_j+2}}{N_{r_j+2}(p_{j+r_j+2} - n'_{j-1})}$$

while Proposition 4.2 yields

$$h_j(n) \geq \frac{N_{j+r_j+1}}{N_{r_j}(p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j)^*}.$$

We set  $a = p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j$  and  $\Delta = p_{j+r_j+2} - p_{r_j+1} - p_{r_j+2}$  so that (6.16) allows to write  $p_{j+r_j+2} - n'_{j-1} = \Delta + a$ , and we have

$$(6.17) \quad \frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} \leq \frac{p_{j+r_j+2}}{p_{r_j+1}p_{r_j+2}} \frac{(a)^*}{\Delta + a}.$$

(6.16) can be rewritten as

$$(6.18) \quad 2 = p_1 \leq p_{r_j+1} < a = p_{j+r_j+1} - n'_j \leq p_{r_j+1} + p_{r_j+2}.$$

Lemma 2.1 implies  $(a)^* \leq 11a/8$  and, by (6.4),  $\Delta > 0$  holds, so that the homographic function  $t \mapsto t/(\Delta + t)$  is increasing. From (6.18), we thus have

$$\frac{a}{\Delta + a} \leq \frac{p_{r_j+1} + p_{r_j+2}}{\Delta + p_{r_j+1} + p_{r_j+2}} = \frac{p_{r_j+1} + p_{r_j+2}}{p_{j+r_j+2}}.$$

Therefore, we get

$$\frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} \leq \frac{11}{8} \frac{p_{r_j+1} + p_{r_j+2}}{p_{r_j+1}p_{r_j+2}} = \frac{11}{8} \left( \frac{1}{p_{r_j+1}} + \frac{1}{p_{r_j+2}} \right)$$

which is smaller than  $\frac{5}{6}$  if  $r_j \geq 1$ .

It remains to consider the case  $r_j = 0, r_{j-1} = 2$ . Formula (6.17) becomes

$$(6.19) \quad \frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} \leq \frac{p_{j+2}}{6} \frac{(a)^*}{p_{j+2} - 5 + a}$$

while (6.18) via (6.3) becomes

$$(6.20) \quad 2 < a = p_{j+1} - n'_j = \sigma_{j+1} - n \leq 5.$$

Since  $j \geq 2$  holds, note that (6.20) implies  $\sigma_j \leq \sigma_{j+1} - 5 \leq n < \sigma_{j+1} - 2$ , which shows from (1.8) that  $k(n) = j$ .

- If  $a = 5$ , since  $n = \sigma_{j+1} - a = \sigma_{j+1} - 5$ , by Corollary 4.1 with  $r = r_j = 0$  and  $q = 5$ , we get  $h_j(n) = N_{j+1}/5$ , while Proposition 3.2 gives

$$h_{j-1}(\sigma_{j+1} - 5) = h_{j-1}(\sigma_{j+1} - \sigma_2) = \frac{N_{j+1}}{N_2} = \frac{N_{j+1}}{6}.$$

Therefore,  $h_{j-1}(\sigma_{j+1} - 5)/h_j(\sigma_{j+1} - 5) = 5/6$ .



- If  $a = 4$ , by Proposition 5.1, we get  $h_j(\sigma_{j+1} - 4) = h_j(\sigma_{j+1} - 5)$  and, by Proposition 5.2,  $h_{j-1}(\sigma_{j+1} - 4) = h_{j-1}(\sigma_{j+1} - 5)$  so that

$$\frac{h_{j-1}(\sigma_{j+1} - 4)}{h_j(\sigma_{j+1} - 4)} = \frac{h_{j-1}(\sigma_{j+1} - 5)}{h_j(\sigma_{j+1} - 5)} = \frac{5}{6}.$$

- If  $a = 3$ , Formula (6.19) becomes

$$\frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} \leq \frac{p_{j+2}}{2(p_{j+2} - 2)} \leq \frac{7}{10} < \frac{5}{6}$$

since  $p_{j+2} \geq p_4 = 7$ .

### Second case : $r_j \geq j + 3$

From (6.2), we deduce  $n \geq \sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j+1} = \sigma_{(j-1)+(r_j+1)} - \sigma_{(r_j+1)}$  and Proposition 3.2, (3.3), implies

$$(6.21) \quad \ell(h_{j-1}(n)) \geq \sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j+1}.$$

Let us now show that

$$(6.22) \quad q \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} P^+(h_{j-1}(n)) \geq p_{j+r_j}.$$

Indeed, if  $q \leq p_{j+r_j-1}$  holds, since  $h_{j-1}(n)$  has  $j - 1$  prime factors, we should have

$$\begin{aligned} \ell(h_{j-1}(n)) &\leq p_{j+r_j-1} + p_{j+r_j-2} + \dots + p_{r_j+1} \\ &< p_{j+r_j} + p_{j+r_j-1} + \dots + p_{r_j+2} = \sigma_{j+r_j} - \sigma_{r_j+1} \end{aligned}$$

which would contradict (6.21).

Further, among the  $j + 1$  primes  $p_2 = 3, p_3, \dots, p_{j+2}$ , there are certainly two primes  $p$  and  $p'$  not dividing  $h_{j-1}(n)$  and satisfying  $3 \leq p < p' \leq p_{j+2}$ . By Lemma 2.4, (2.5), and (6.22), we get

$$(6.23) \quad p + p' \leq p_{j+1} + p_{j+2} \leq p_{2j+3} \leq p_{j+r_j} \leq q = P^+(h_{j-1}(n))$$

and, applying Proposition 3.4 proves  $\frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} < \frac{5}{6}$ .

### Third case : $j - 3 \leq r_j \leq j + 2$ and $j \geq 25$

The proof is the same than for the second case; only, in (6.23), instead of (2.5), we use (2.6) with  $b = 7$ ,  $i = j + 2 \geq 27$  :

$$p + p' \leq p_{j+1} + p_{j+2} < p_{2j-3} \leq p_{j+r_j} \leq q = P^+(h_{j-1}(n)).$$

**Fourth case :**  $j - 3 \leq r_j \leq j + 2$  and  $j \leq 24$

Here, we have  $r_j \leq j + 2 \leq 26$  and, from (6.2), we get

$$n < \sigma_{j+r_j+1} \leq \sigma_{51} = 5350.$$

So, for  $k \leq 50$ ,  $\sigma_k \leq n < \sigma_{k+1}$  and  $1 \leq j \leq k$ , we have computed  $h_j(n)$  with the algorithm described in Section 1.4 and we have checked that, for  $j \geq 2$ ,

$$\frac{h_{j-1}(n)}{h_j(n)} \leq \frac{5}{6}$$

always holds, with equality if and only if  $j = k(n)$  and  $n = \sigma_{j+1} - 4$  or  $n = \sigma_{j+1} - 5$ .  $\square$

**Corollary 6.1.** *For all non-negative integer  $n \geq 2$ , we have*

$$(6.24) \quad h(n) = h_k(n)$$

where  $k = k(n)$  is defined by (1.8).

*Proof.* From (1.1) and (1.9) we have

$$h(n) = \max_{0 \leq j \leq k(n)} h_j(n)$$

and Theorem 6.1 yields  $h_0(n) < h_1(n) < \dots < h_{k(n)}(n)$ .  $\square$

## 7 Computation of $\pi_f(x)$

Let  $f$  be an arithmetic function, i.e a function defined on positive integers. The simplest way to compute  $\pi_f(x)$  defined in (1.5) is to generate the primes up to  $x$  by Eratosthenes's sieve, which is too expensive for large values of  $x$ .

**Definition 7.1.** *An arithmetic function  $f$  is said to be completely multiplicative if  $f(ab) = f(a)f(b)$  for all  $a$  and  $b$ . If  $f \neq 0$ , this implies  $f(1) = 1$ .*

Following ideas of the german astronomer Meissel, Lagarias, Miller and Odlyzko gave in [8] an algorithm that computes  $\pi(x)$  with a cost  $O\left(\frac{x^{2/3}}{\log x}\right)$ .

In this work they also remark that their algorithm allows to compute  $\pi_f(x)$  for every completely multiplicative arithmetic function  $f$ .

This method has been improved in [4] to compute  $\pi(x)$  with a cost  $O\left(\frac{x^{2/3}}{\log^2 x}\right)$ , provided that all the arithmetic operations on integers are of constant cost  $O(1)$ , not depending on the size of the operands. We show here that this improved algorithm may be used to compute  $\pi_f(x)$  with a cost which is still  $O\left(\frac{x^{2/3}}{\log^2 x}\right)$ , for a large subset of the set of completely multiplicative arithmetic functions. More precisely we have the proposition :

**Proposition 7.1.** *Let  $f$  be a completely multiplicative arithmetic function with integer values. Let  $F$  be the summatory function of  $f$ ,*

$$(7.1) \quad F(x) = \sum_{n \leq x} f(n).$$

*We suppose that all the ordinary arithmetic operations about integers are of constant cost  $O(1)$ , and that*

1. *Each value  $f(n)$  may be computed in time  $O(1)$ , not depending of the size of  $n$ .*
2. *There is an algorithm computing*

$$(7.2) \quad S_0(y, x) = \sum_{1 \leq n \leq y} \mu(n) f(n) F\left(\frac{x}{n}\right)$$

*in time  $O(x^{2/3}/\log^2 x)$ .*

*Then, there is an algorithm computing  $\pi_f(x) = \sum_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p \text{ prime}}} f(p)$  in time  $O\left(\frac{x^{2/3}}{\log^2 x}\right)$ .*

*When  $F(u)$  can be computed in  $O(1)$  time, the second hypothesis is satisfied.*

**Remarks :**

1. The second hypothesis may seem strange. Let us give a few words of explanation.
  - Our computation of  $\pi_f(x)$  begins by choosing  $y = O(x^{1/3+\varepsilon})$ . Then we compute  $S_0 = S_0(y, x)$  (this is the *contribution of ordinary leaves* defined in lemma 5.2, equation (9) in [4] and in lemma 7.2, equation (7.14) in this article). Function  $F$  does not appear elsewhere in the algorithm.  $S_0$  being computed, the total cost of the other computations is  $O(x^{2/3}/\log^2 x)$ . Condition (2) ensures that our algorithm computes  $\pi_f(x)$  in time  $O(x^{2/3}/\log^2 x)$ .
  - In many cases,  $F(u)$  can be computed in time  $O(1)$ , then the sum (7.2) can be computed in time  $O(y)$ , by precomputing the Möbius function, so that the second hypothesis is satisfied.
2. In Proposition 7.1 we restrict ourselves to the case of integer valued functions. The case of real valued functions is more delicate because of truncation errors. In [1], Bach and al. have elaborated an algorithm to compute  $\pi_f(x)$  where  $f(n) = 1/n$ , and  $x = 1\,801\,241\,484\,456\,448\,000 = 1.8 \dots \times 10^{18}$ .

### Algorithm for $\pi_f(x)$

We will describe very briefly our algorithm to compute  $\pi_f(x)$ , using notations and formulas which, when replacing  $f$  by 1, reduce to the corresponding ones contained in [4].

For  $b \in \mathbb{N}$ , let us define  $\Phi(x, b)$  as the sum of the  $f(n)$ , for the  $n$ 's  $\in [1, x]$  that subsist after sieving this interval by all primes  $p_1, p_2, \dots, p_b$ ,

$$(7.3) \quad \Phi(x, 0) = \sum_{1 \leq n \leq x} f(n) = F(x) \quad \text{and, for } b \geq 1, \quad \Phi(x, b) = \sum_{\substack{1 \leq n \leq x \\ P^-(n) > p_b}} f(n)$$

For  $k \geq 1$  and  $b \geq 1$ , let us set

$$(7.4) \quad P_k(x, b) = \sum_{\substack{1 \leq n \leq x \\ \Omega(n)=k, \quad P^-(n) > p_b}} f(n).$$

so that, from (7.3) and (7.4) we get, for  $x \geq 1$ ,

$$(7.5) \quad \Phi(x, b) = 1 + P_1(x, b) + P_2(x, b) + \dots$$

From now on, we choose  $y \in \mathbb{R}$

$$(7.6) \quad x^{1/3} \leq y \leq \sqrt{x} \quad \text{and set} \quad a = \pi(y).$$

We will precise later the best choice for  $y$ , which is closed to  $x^{1/3}$ .

Since  $y \geq x^{1/3}$  equation (7.4) yields  $P_k(x, a) = 0$  for  $k \geq 3$  and (7.5) becomes

$$\Phi(x, a) = 1 + P_1(x, a) + P_2(x, a).$$

$$\text{Since } P_1(x, a) = \sum_{p_a < p \leq x} f(p) = \sum_{y < p \leq x} f(p) = \pi_f(x) - \pi_f(y),$$

$$(7.7) \quad \pi_f(x) = \Phi(x, a) + \pi_f(y) - 1 - P_2(x, a).$$

Replacing  $f$  by 1 (and  $\pi_f$  by  $\pi$ ), formula (7.7) is formula (4) in [4].

### 7.1 Initialization of the computation: the 2 basis tables

After fixing  $y$ , by using Eratosthenes's sieve, we precompute the table of primes up to  $y$ , and the table of the values  $\pi_f(u)$  for  $1 \leq u \leq y$ . The cost of these initializations is  $O(y \log \log y)$ .

## 7.2 Computation of $P_2(x, a)$

Definition (7.4) and the complete multiplicativity of  $f$  give

$$P_2(x, a) = \sum_{\substack{y < p \leq q \leq x \\ pq \leq x}} f(pq) = \sum_{\substack{y < p \leq q \leq x \\ pq \leq x}} f(p)f(q)$$

where  $p$  and  $q$  are primes. The  $p$ 's figuring in this sum satisfy  $p \leq \frac{x}{q} \leq \frac{x}{y}$  and we get

$$P_2(x, a) = \sum_{y < p \leq x/y} f(p) \sum_{p \leq q \leq x/p} f(q).$$

We remark that, for  $p > \sqrt{x}$ , the sum on  $q$  vanishes. Since, by (7.6),  $\sqrt{x} \leq \frac{x}{y}$ , we have

$$P_2(x, a) = \sum_{y < p \leq \sqrt{x}} f(p) \sum_{p \leq q \leq x/p} f(q) = \sum_{y < p \leq \sqrt{x}} f(p) \left( \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{p}\right) - \pi_f(p-1) \right)$$

or

$$(7.8) \quad P_2(x, a) = \sum_{y < p \leq \sqrt{x}} f(p) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{p}\right) - \sum_{y < p \leq \sqrt{x}} f(p) \pi_f(p-1).$$

In the above formula, the values of  $p$  are bounded above by  $\sqrt{x}$  which is larger than  $y$ . Thus we cannot find these primes  $p$ , nor the values  $\pi_f(p-1)$  in the precomputed tables (cf. §7.1), and we generate them using a sieve of  $[1, \sqrt{x}]$ , which we call the *auxilliary sieve*. The values of  $x/p$  lie in the interval  $[1, x/y]$ . So we will get the values  $\pi_f(x/p)$  by an other sieve, the *main sieve*. Let us note that the respective sizes of the sieve intervals,  $\sqrt{x}$  and  $x/y$ , are too large to allow a sieve in one pass. Thus the two sieves will be done by blocks of size  $y$  that must be synchronized.

- **Initialization: Computation of  $\varpi$ , the largest prime  $\leq \sqrt{x}$  and of  $\pi_f(\varpi)$ .** By Eratosthenes's sieve we compute the largest prime  $\varpi$  not exceeding  $\sqrt{x}$  and calculate  $\pi_f(\varpi)$ . The auxilliary sieve is then initoalized by putting in the sieve-table the primes  $p$  of the block  $[\sqrt{x} - y + 1, \sqrt{x}]$ . The main sieve is initialized by sieving the first block  $[A, B] = [\sqrt{x}, \sqrt{x} + y - 1]$ . The cost of this phase is  $O(x^{1/2} \log \log x)$ .
- **Computing  $P_2(x, a)$ .** We use formula (7.8), getting in decreasing order the primes  $p \in (y, \sqrt{x}]$  and the  $f(p)\pi_f(p-1)$  from the auxilliary sieve, and getting the values  $\pi_f(x/p)$  from the main sieve whose successive blocks will cover in ascending order the interval  $[\sqrt{x}, x/y]$ . We initialize a variable  $p$  with the value  $\varpi$ , a variable  $T$  with the value  $\pi_f(\varpi)$  and a variable  $P_2$  with the value 0. Then, while  $p > y$ , we repeat :

- subtract  $f(p)$  from  $T$ . Thus the new value of  $T$  is  $\pi_f(p-1)$ .
- If  $x/p > B$ , while  $x/p > B$  we replace the block  $[A, B]$  by the next block  $[A+y, B+y]$  and we sieve it. When  $x/p \in [A, B]$  we get  $\pi_f(x/p)$  in the main sieve table and we add  $f(p)\pi_f(x/p) - f(p)T$  to  $P_2$ .
- Using the auxilliary sieve, replace  $p$  by its predecessor.

The final value of the variable  $P_2$  is  $P_2(x, a)$ . The first step is negligible in cost, compared to the second. Thus the computation of  $P_2(x, a)$  is of total cost  $O\left(\frac{x}{y} \log \log y\right)$ .

### 7.3 Computation of $\Phi(x, a)$

The following lemma is proved as lemma 5.1 in [4].

**Lemma 7.1.** *For every  $u \geq 0$ , and for  $b \geq 1$ ,*

$$(7.9) \quad \Phi(u, 0) = F(u)$$

$$(7.10) \quad \Phi(u, b) = \Phi(u, b-1) - f(p_b)\Phi\left(\frac{u}{p_b}, b-1\right)$$

This relation gives an obvious method for computing  $\Phi(x, a)$ . Starting from the tree with the only node  $\Phi(x, a)$ , and applying repeatedly (7.10) we get a tree whose all nodes, except the root node, are labelled by a formula of the form

$$(7.11) \quad \mu(n)f(n)\Phi\left(\frac{x}{n}, b\right)$$

where  $b \leq a-1$  and  $n = 1$  or  $n$  is a squarefree integer with prime factors  $q \in \{p_{b+1}, \dots, p_a\}$ .

If we repeat this expansions until all the leaves of the resulting tree are labelled by formulas  $\mu(n)f(n)\Phi\left(\frac{x}{n}, 0\right)$ , using (7.9) we get the formula :

$$(7.12) \quad \Phi(x, a) = \sum_{\substack{1 \leq n \leq x \\ P^+(n) \leq y}} \mu(n)f(n)\Phi\left(\frac{x}{n}, 0\right) = \sum_{\substack{1 \leq n \leq x \\ P^+(n) \leq y}} \mu(n)f(n)F\left(\frac{x}{n}\right)$$

which, when  $f = 1$  is formula  $\Phi(x, a) = \sum_{\substack{1 \leq n \leq x \\ P^+(n) \leq y}} \mu(n) \left\lfloor \frac{x}{n} \right\rfloor$  (cf. [4, p. 237]).

The number of terms in (7.12) is much too large. In order to get a sum with fewer terms we replace the trivial rule

**Rule 1 :** *Expand (7.11) using (7.10) if  $b > 0$ ,*

which leads to (7.12) by the new rule

**Rule 2 :** *Expand node(7.11) only if  $b > 0$  and  $n \leq y$ .*

Expanding the computation tree with rule 2 instead of rule 1 we get

**Lemma 7.2.** *We have*

$$(7.13) \quad \Phi(x, b) = S_0 + S,$$

where  $S_0$  is the contribution of ordinary leaves

$$(7.14) \quad S_0 = S_0(y, x) = \sum_{1 \leq n \leq y} \mu(n) f(n) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{n}, 0\right) = \sum_{1 \leq n \leq y} \mu(n) f(n) F\left(\frac{x}{n}\right)$$

and  $S$ , the contribution of special leaves, is

$$(7.15) \quad S = \sum_{\frac{n}{P^-(n)} \leq y < n} \mu(n) f(n) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{n}, \pi(P^-(n)) - 1\right).$$

This lemma corresponds to lemma (5.2) in [4].

### 7.3.1 Computation of $S_0$

In the general case, the computation of  $S_0$  is done with a cost  $O(x^{2/3}/\log^2 x)$  thanks to the condition 2 in proposition 7.1.

In the case we will consider later in this work, the computation of  $\pi_{id}(x)$ ,  $f(n) = n$ , thus  $F(u) = \frac{[u][u+1]}{2}$  is computed in  $O(1)$  time and the computation of  $S_0(x, y)$  is of cost  $O(y) = o(x^{2/3}/\log^2 x)$ .

### 7.3.2 Computation of $S$

In the sum (7.15), let us set  $n = mp$  with  $p = P^-(n)$ . Grouping together all the  $n$ 's according to the value of  $p$ , we get

$$(7.16) \quad S = - \sum_{p \leq y} f(p) \sum_{\substack{P^-(m) > p \\ m \leq y < mp}} \mu(m) f(m) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right).$$

The computation of  $S$  from (7.16) is the complicate part of the algorithm. In the following paragraph we show that it is relatively simple to get a cost  $O(x^{2/3+\varepsilon})$ .

### 7.3.3 How to compute $S$ in $O(x^{2/3+\varepsilon})$

In this section, we explain a first method to get  $\pi_f(x)$ , rather simple to implement, and whose running time is  $O(x^{2/3+\varepsilon})$ . We take  $y = x^{1/3}$ . Since  $mp > y$  all the values  $u = x/mp$  appearing in (7.16) are less than  $x^{2/3}$ . We sieve the interval  $\left[1, \frac{x}{y}\right)$  successively by all primes  $p \leq y$ . After the sieve by  $p$ , from the definition (7.3) of  $\Phi$ , for all the  $m$ 's such that  $m \leq y < mp$ , we get in the sieve table the value  $\Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$ , and we add to  $S$  the value  $f(p)\mu(m)f(m)\Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$ .

But, if we proceed in the naive way, after sieving by each  $p$ , we will update the sieve table, putting in the case of index  $u$  the sum of  $f(n)$  for the  $n$ 's,  $n \leq u$  that are still in the table. This is excluded because, for each  $p$  this would cost  $O(x/y)$  operations, and the total cost of these updatings would be  $\gg \pi(y)(x/y) = x/\log x$ . As explained in [8] (the 7 last-lines p. 545 and the first half of p. 546) we use an auxiliary data structure such that, for a price of  $O(\log x)$  time in place of  $O(1)$  for each access, we don't need to update the sieve table after each sieve. To be a little more precise let us say that this structure is a labelled binary tree. There is a leave for each index  $i$  of the table sieve, this leave is labelled by the value  $f(i)$ , and each interior node is labelled by the sum of labels of its two sons. Proceeding in this way the cost of the sieve is  $O\left(\frac{x}{y} \log x \log \log x\right)$ , while the cost of retrieving the values  $f(p)\mu(m)f(m)\Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$  is  $O(\pi(y)y \log x)$ . Both costs are  $O(x^{2/3+\varepsilon})$  with our choice  $y = x^{1/3}$ .

### 7.3.4 Faster computation of $S$

In this section, we explain how to carry out the computation of  $\pi_f(x)$  in  $O\left(\frac{x^{2/3}}{\log^2 x}\right)$ . We take  $y = x^{1/3}(\log x)^3 \log \log x$ . To speed up the computation of  $S$  we partition (7.16) in 3 subsums  $S = S_1 + S_2 + S_3$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} S_1 &= - \sum_{x^{\frac{1}{3}} < p \leq y} f(p) \sum_{\substack{P^-(m) > p \\ m \leq y < mp}} \mu(m)f(m)\Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right) \\ S_2 &= - \sum_{x^{\frac{1}{4}} < p \leq x^{\frac{1}{3}}} f(p) \sum_{\substack{P^-(m) > p \\ m \leq y < mp}} \mu(m)f(m)\Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right) \end{aligned}$$



$$S_3 = - \sum_{p \leq x^{\frac{1}{4}}} f(p) \sum_{\substack{P^-(m) > p \\ m \leq y < mp}} \mu(m) f(m) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$$

We will show that  $S_1$  is quickly computed in  $O(y)$  time.  $S_3$  will be computed by sieve, as explained in §7.3.3, but faster because the number of values for  $p$  is reduced from  $\pi(y)$  to  $\pi(x^{1/4})$ . The main part of the computation will be the computation of  $S_2$ .

As in [4], we first observe that the  $m$ 's involved in  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are all prime and therefore :

$$(7.17) \quad S_1 = \sum_{x^{\frac{1}{3}} < p \leq y} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq y} f(q) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{pq}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$$

$$(7.18) \quad S_2 = \sum_{x^{\frac{1}{4}} < p \leq x^{\frac{1}{3}}} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq y} f(q) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{pq}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$$

**Computing  $S_1$**  As in [4] we remark that, in (7.17), we have  $\frac{x}{pq} < x^{1/3} < p$ .

Thus, all the values  $\Phi\left(\frac{x}{pq}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$  are equal to 1. Therefore

$$S_1 = \sum_{x^{\frac{1}{3}} < p \leq y} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq y} f(q) = \sum_{x^{\frac{1}{3}} < p \leq y} f(p) (\pi_f(y) - \pi_f(p)).$$

This value is computed in  $O(y)$  additions, using the precomputed table of the values  $\pi_f(u)$  for  $1 \leq u \leq y$ .

**Computing  $S_3$**  For each  $p \leq x^{1/4}$  we precompute the list of all the square-free  $m \leq y$  whose least factor is  $p$ .

We sieve the interval  $\left[1, \frac{x}{y}\right]$  successively by all the primes up to  $x^{1/4}$ . As soon as we have sieved by  $p$ , using the precomputed lists of squarefree whose least prime factor is a prime  $q > p$  we sum the

$$f(p) \sum_{\substack{P^-(m) > p \\ m \leq y < mp}} \mu(m) f(m) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$$

for all squarefree  $m \in [y/p, y)$  such that  $P^-(m) > p$ . This computation is done by blocks, using the auxiliary structure, as explained at the end of § 7.3.3.

Thus the cost of sieving is  $O\left(\frac{x}{y} \log x \log \log x\right)$ . The number of values of  $p$  is  $\pi(x^{1/4})$  and the number of values of  $m$  is less than  $y$ , thus the cost of retrieving the values  $f(p)\mu(m)f(m)\Phi\left(\frac{x}{mp}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$  is  $O\left(\pi(x^{1/4}) \times \log x \times y\right)$ . Thus computing  $S_3$  is of cost  $O\left(\frac{x}{y} \log x \log \log x + yx^{1/4}\right)$ .

**Computing  $S_2$**  We split the sum (7.18) in two parts depending on  $q > x/p^2$  or  $q \leq x/p^2$ . It gives

$$S_2 = U + V$$

with

$$U = \sum_{x^{\frac{1}{4}} < p \leq x^{\frac{1}{3}}} f(p) \sum_{\substack{p < q \leq y \\ q > x/p^2}} f(q) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{pq}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$$

and

$$V = \sum_{x^{\frac{1}{4}} < p \leq x^{\frac{1}{3}}} f(p) \sum_{\substack{p < q \leq y \\ q \leq x/p^2}} f(q) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{pq}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$$

**Computing  $U$**  With  $y < \sqrt{x}$  (cf. (7.6)), the condition  $q > x/p^2$  implies  $p^2 > x/q \geq x/y \geq x^{1/2}$ . Thus,

$$U = \sum_{\sqrt{x/y} < p \leq x^{1/3}} f(p) \sum_{\substack{p < q \leq y \\ q > x/p^2}} f(q) \Phi\left(\frac{x}{pq}, \pi(p) - 1\right)$$

From  $x/p^2 < q$  we deduce  $x/pq < p$  and  $\Phi(x/pq, \pi(p) - 1) = 1$ , and we have  $x/p^2 \geq p$  so that

$$U = \sum_{\sqrt{x/y} < p \leq x^{1/3}} f(p) \sum_{\substack{p < q \leq y \\ q > x/p^2}} f(q) = \sum_{\sqrt{x/y} < p \leq x^{1/3}} f(p) \left( \pi_f(y) - \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{p^2}\right) \right).$$

Since  $x/p^2 < q \leq y$  the sum  $U$  is calculated in  $O(y)$  operations with the table of values of  $\pi_f(u)$ .

**Computing  $V$**  For each term involved in  $V$  we have  $p \leq \frac{x}{pq} < x^{1/2} < p^2$ . Hence, by (7.3),  $\Phi(x/(pq), \pi(p) - 1)$  is the sum of  $f(n)$  for  $n$  satisfying  $n \leq x/pq$  and  $P^-(n) \geq p$ . These  $n$ 's are  $n = 1$  and all the primes  $n$  satisfying  $p - 1 < n \leq x/(pq)$ . Thus

$$\Phi\left(\frac{x}{pq}, \pi(p) - 1\right) = 1 + \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right) - \pi_f(p - 1)$$

And we write

$$V = V_1 + V_2$$

with

$$\begin{aligned} V_1 &= \sum_{x^{1/4} \leq p < x^{1/3}} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq \min(\frac{x}{p^2}, y)} f(q)(1 - \pi_f(p-1)) \\ V_2 &= \sum_{x^{1/4} \leq p < x^{1/3}} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq \min(\frac{x}{p^2}, y)} f(q) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right) \end{aligned}$$

Computing  $V_1$  can be achieved in  $O(y)$  time once we have tabulated  $\pi_f(u)$  for  $u \leq y$ .

**Computing  $V_2$ .** We first split  $V_2$  in two parts in order to simplify the condition  $q \leq \min(x/p^2, y)$  :

$$V_2 = \sum_{x^{1/4} < p \leq \sqrt{\frac{x}{y}}} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq y} f(q) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right) + \sum_{\sqrt{\frac{x}{y}} < p < x^{1/3}} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq \frac{x}{p^2}} f(q) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right)$$

In the purpose to speed up the computation of the above two sums we now write,  $V_2 = W_1 + W_2 + W_3 + W_4 + W_5$  with

$$\begin{aligned} W_1 &= \sum_{x^{1/4} < p \leq \frac{x}{y^2}} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq y} f(q) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right) \\ W_2 &= \sum_{\frac{x}{y^2} < p \leq \sqrt{\frac{x}{y}}} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq \sqrt{\frac{x}{p}}} f(q) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right) \\ W_3 &= \sum_{\frac{x}{y^2} < p \leq \sqrt{\frac{x}{y}}} f(p) \sum_{\sqrt{\frac{x}{p}} < q \leq y} f(q) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right) \\ W_4 &= \sum_{\sqrt{\frac{x}{y}} < p \leq x^{1/3}} f(p) \sum_{p < q \leq \sqrt{\frac{x}{p}}} f(q) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right) \\ W_5 &= \sum_{\sqrt{\frac{x}{y}} < p \leq x^{1/3}} f(p) \sum_{\sqrt{\frac{x}{p}} < q \leq \frac{x}{p^2}} f(q) \pi_f\left(\frac{x}{pq}\right) \end{aligned}$$

**Computing  $W_1$  and  $W_2$**  These two quantities need values of  $\pi_f(x/pq)$  with  $x^{1/3} < x/pq < x^{1/2}$ . These are computed with a sieve of the interval  $[1, \sqrt{x}]$ . The sieving is done by blocks, and, for each block, we sum  $f(p)f(q)\pi_f(x/pq)$  for the pairs  $(p, q)$  satisfying the conditions of the sum  $W_1$  or  $W_2$  and such that  $x/pq$  lies in the block.

The cost of this computation is the sum of three terms :

- The cost of the above sieve on  $[1, \sqrt{x}]$  is  $O(\sqrt{x} \log \log x)$ .
- The cost of adding the terms of the sum  $W_1$ ,  $O\left(\frac{x}{y \log^2 x}\right)$ .
- The cost of adding the terms of the sum  $W_2$ ,  $O\left(\frac{x^{3/4}}{y^{1/4} \log^2 x}\right)$ .

**Computing  $W_3$  and  $W_5$**  For  $W_3$ , for each  $p$  we apply lemma 2.6 with  $z = x/p$  and  $u = y$ . Thus, for each value of  $p$ , the sum on  $q$  costs  $O\left(\pi(\sqrt{x/p})\right)$ , and the total cost of the computation of  $W_3$  is

$$O\left(\sum_{\frac{x}{y^2} < p \leq \frac{x}{y}} \pi\left(\sqrt{\frac{x}{p}}\right)\right).$$

For  $W_5$ , for each  $p$  we apply lemma 2.6 with  $z = x/p$  and  $u = x/p^2$ . Thus, for each value of  $p$ , the sum on  $q$  costs  $O\left(\pi(\sqrt{x/p})\right)$ , and the total cost of the computation of  $W_5$  is

$$O\left(\sum_{\sqrt{\frac{x}{y}} < p \leq x^{1/3}} \pi\left(\sqrt{\frac{x}{p}}\right)\right).$$

Thus the costs of computing  $W_3$  and  $W_5$  add to

$$O\left(\sum_{\frac{x}{y^2} < p \leq x^{1/3}} \pi\left(\sqrt{\frac{x}{p}}\right)\right) = O\left(\sum_{\frac{x}{y^2} < p \leq x^{1/3}} \left(\frac{\sqrt{\frac{x}{p}}}{\log \frac{x}{p}}\right)\right) = O\left(\frac{x^{2/3}}{\log^2 x}\right).$$

**Computing  $W_4$**  We simply sum over  $(p, q)$ . There would be no advantage to proceed as for  $W_3$  since most of the values  $\pi_f(x/pq)$  are distinct. The cost is

$$O\left(\sum_{\sqrt{\frac{x}{y}} < p \leq x^{1/3}} \pi\left(\sqrt{\frac{x}{p}}\right)\right) = O\left(\frac{x^{2/3}}{\log^2 x}\right).$$

As in [4], section 8, we then see that, since  $y = x^{1/3} \log^3 x \log \log x$ , the total cost of the computation of  $\pi_f(x)$  is  $O(x^{2/3}/\log^2 x)$ .

## 8 The algorithm to calculate $h(n)$

### 8.1 The function $G(p_k, m)$

The function  $G(p_k, m)$  has been introduced and studied in [5].

**Definition 8.1.** Let  $p_k$  be the  $k$ -th prime, for some  $k \geq 3$  and  $m$  an integer satisfying  $0 \leq m \leq p_{k+1} - 3$ . We define

$$(8.1) \quad G(p_k, m) = \max \frac{Q_1 Q_2 \cdots Q_s}{q_1 q_2 \cdots q_s}$$

where the maximum is taken over the primes  $Q_1, Q_2, \dots, Q_s, q_1, q_2, \dots, q_s$  ( $s \geq 0$ ) satisfying

$$(8.2) \quad 3 \leq q_s < q_{s-1} < \cdots < q_1 \leq p_k < p_{k+1} \leq Q_1 < Q_2 < \cdots < Q_s$$

and

$$(8.3) \quad \sum_{i=1}^s (Q_i - q_i) \leq m.$$

The additive function  $\ell$  (cf. §1.1) can easily be extended to fractions by setting

$$\ell(M/N) = \ell(M) - \ell(N)$$

when  $M$  and  $N$  are coprime or are both squarefree. Therefore, the inequality (8.3) implies

$$(8.4) \quad \ell(G(p_k, m)) \leq m.$$

#### 8.1.1 Properties of $G(p_k, m)$

Obviously,  $G(p_k, m)$  is non-decreasing on  $m$  and  $G(p_k, 2m+1) = G(p_k, 2m)$ . The maximum in (8.1) is unique (from the uniqueness of the standard factorization into primes). For small  $m$ 's, we have

$$(8.5) \quad 0 \leq m < p_{k+1} - p_k \implies G(p_k, m) = 1.$$

From Proposition 8 of [5], we have

$$(8.6) \quad \frac{p_{k+1}}{(p_{k+1} - m)^*} \leq G(p_k, m) \leq \frac{p_{k+1}}{p_{k+1} - m}.$$

Note that if  $p_{k+1} - m$  is prime, then (8.6) yields the exact value of  $G(p_k, m)$ .

### 8.1.2 Computation of $G(p_k, m)$

In [5, §8], two algorithms are given to calculate  $G(p_k, m)$ .

The first one is a combinatorial algorithm. In its first step, the primes allowed to divide the denominator of  $G(p_k, m)$  are determined. From (8.2) and (8.3), they are all the primes in the range  $[(p_{k+1} - m), p_k]$ , say  $P_1 < P_2 < \dots < P_K$ . Similarly, the primes authorized to divide the numerator are all the primes  $P_{K+1} < P_{K+2} < \dots < P_R$  in  $[p_{k+1}, p_k + m]$ . By setting  $\mathcal{P}' = \{P_1, P_2, \dots, P_R\}$ , from the definition (1.14), we get

$$G(p_k, m) = \frac{1}{P_1 P_2 \dots P_K} h_K(P_1 + P_2 + \dots + P_K + m, \mathcal{P}')$$

and  $h_j(n, \mathcal{P}')$  can be computed by induction on  $j$  in a way similar to that exposed in §1.4. In [5, §8], one can find the details and also some tricks to improve the running time of this combinatorial algorithm which, however, remains rather slow when  $m$  is large.

The second algorithm, which is more sophisticated, is based on the following remark : if  $G(p_k, m) = \frac{Q_1 Q_2 \dots Q_s}{q_1 q_2 \dots q_s}$  and  $m$  is large, the least prime factor  $q_s$  of the denominator is close to  $p_{k+1} - m$  while all the other primes  $Q_1, \dots, Q_s, q_1, \dots, q_{s-1}$  are close to  $p_k$ .

More precisely, the following proposition (which is Proposition 10 of [5]) says that if  $p_{k+1} - m + \delta$  is prime for some small  $\delta$  and if  $G(p_{k+1}, \delta)$  is not too small, then the computation of  $G(p_k, m)$  is reduced to the computation of  $G(p_{k+1}, m')$  for few small values of  $m'$ , which can be done by the above combinatorial algorithm.

**Proposition 8.1.** *We want to compute  $G(p_k, m)$  as defined in (8.1) with  $p_k$  odd and  $p_{k+1} - p_k \leq m \leq p_{k+1} - 3$ . We assume that we know some even non-negative integer  $\delta$  satisfying*

$$(8.7) \quad p_{k+1} - m + \delta \quad \text{is prime,}$$

$$(8.8) \quad G(p_{k+1}, \delta) \geq 1 + \frac{\delta}{p_{k+1}}$$

and

$$(8.9) \quad \delta < \frac{2m}{9} < \frac{2p_{k+1}}{9}.$$

If  $\delta = 0$ , we know from (8.6) that  $G(p_k, m) = \frac{p_{k+1}}{p_{k+1} - m}$ . If  $\delta > 0$ , we have

$$(8.10) \quad G(p_k, m) = \max_{\substack{q \text{ prime} \\ p_{k+1} - m \leq q \leq \hat{q}}} \frac{p_{k+1}}{q} G(p_{k+1}, m - p_{k+1} + q),$$

where  $\widehat{q}$  is defined by

$$(8.11) \quad \widehat{q} = \frac{p_{k+1}p_{k+2}(p_{k+1} - m + \delta)}{(p_{k+1} + \delta)(p_{k+1} - 3\delta/2)} \leq p_{k+2} - m + \frac{3\delta}{2}.$$

How to compute  $G(p_k, m)$ ? The combinatorial algorithm should be tried if  $m$  is small, but it is quadratic in  $m$  and has no chance to terminate if  $m$  is larger than, say,  $10^6$ . We have no guarantee that the conditions of Prop. 8.1 are satisfied. However in all our numerical applications, we have found  $\delta < 1000$  in (8.7) (see [5, §9.2]), so that, by (8.10) and (8.11), we have

$$m - p_{k+1} + q \leq m - p_{k+1} + \widehat{q} \leq p_{k+2} - p_{k+1} + \frac{3\delta}{2}$$

and, in (8.10),  $G(p_{k+1}, m - p_{k+1} + q)$  can be easily calculated by the combinatorial algorithm.

## 8.2 Description of the algorithm to compute $h(n)$

To compute  $h(n)$ , the first step is to determine  $p_k$  and  $\sigma_k$  defined by (1.8). This step is explained in § 8.2.1 and will furnish also  $p_{k+1}$  and  $n' = n - p_k$ .

### 8.2.1 Computation of $p_k$ and $\sigma_k$

1. Compute  $x = \sqrt{\text{Li}^{-1}(n)}$ , so that  $\text{Li}(x^2) = n$  and  $x \sim \sqrt{n \log n}$ .
2. Using Prop. 7.1, we compute  $\pi_{id}(x)$  in time  $O(x^{2/3}/\log^2 x) = O(n^{1/3}/(\log n)^{-5/3})$ .
3. To get  $\sigma_k$ , we have to add (if  $\pi_{id}(x) < n$ ) or to subtract (if  $\pi_{id}(x) > n$ ) to  $\pi_{id}(x)$  the primes between  $x$  and  $p_k$ , calculated by sieving. In practice, this step is very short. But we are able to estimate it only under Riemann's hypothesis. By lemma 2.5, we have

$$\text{Li}(p_k^2) - \frac{5}{24\pi} p_k^{3/2} \log p_k < \sigma_k \leq n < \sigma_{k+1} < \text{Li}(p_{k+1}^2) + \frac{5}{24\pi} p_{k+1}^{3/2} \log p_{k+1}$$

which implies

$$n = \text{Li}(p_k^2) + O(p_k^{3/2} \log p_k) \sim \text{Li}(p_k^2) \sim \frac{p_k^2}{2 \log p_k}.$$

Therefore, we get  $\log n \sim 2 \log p_k$ ,  $p_k \sim \sqrt{n \log n}$  and

$$(8.12) \quad \text{Li}(p_k^2) = n + O(n^{3/4}(\log n)^{7/4}).$$

Further, since  $x \sim p_k \sim \sqrt{n \log n}$ , we have

$$|n - \text{Li}(p_k^2)| = |\text{Li}(x^2) - \text{Li}(p_k^2)| \sim \frac{|x^2 - p_k^2|}{2 \log x} \sim 2|x - p_k| \sqrt{\frac{n}{\log n}},$$

so that, from (8.12),  $|\pi(x) - \pi(p_k)| \leq |x - p_k| = O(n^{1/4}(\log n)^{9/4})$ .

### 8.2.2 Computation of $h(n)/N_k$

By Corollary 6.1, we have  $h(n) = h_k(n)$ . Let us set  $n' = n - \sigma_k$ . If  $n' = p_{k+1} - 1$  or  $n' = p_{k+1} - 2$ , Proposition 5.3 yields  $h(n) = N_{k+1}/2$ . So, we may suppose  $n' \leq \sigma_{k+1} - 3$ . From the definition (8.1) of function  $G$ , we have

$$(8.13) \quad h(n) = h_k(n) = N_k G(p_k, n')$$

and we compute  $G(p_k, n')$  as explained in §8.1.2. In practice, the computation of  $G(p_k, n)$  is very fast. However, as explained in §8.1.2, we have no estimation of the running time.

Below, are listed some values of  $\frac{h(n)}{N_k} = G(p_k, n')$  together with  $p_k$ ,  $n' = n - \sigma_k$ ,  $e = e(n)$  the largest integer such that  $h(n - e) = h(n)$  and, if the algorithm of Proposition 8.1 is used,  $\delta$  and  $Q$ , the number of primes used in the sum (8.10).

$$n = 10^{12}, p_k = 5477081, n' = 4935150, e = 0, \delta = 18, Q = 1,$$

$$G(p_k, n') = \frac{29998525822277}{2968309525031} = \frac{5477089 \times 5477093}{5477081 \times 541951}.$$

$$n = 10^{35}, p_k = 2898434150644708999, n' = 1886081812111845520, e = 16$$

$$\delta = 134, Q = 5, G(p_k, n') = \frac{2898434150644709023}{1012352338532863519}.$$

The values of  $h(10^a)$  for  $a \leq 35$  and of  $h = 2^b$  for  $b \leq 116$  can be found on the authors's web sites [2, 10], together with the Maple or Sage programs computing  $h(n)/N_k$ .

## 9 An open question

Given  $n$  and  $j < k(n)$ , how to compute  $h_j(n)$ ? We have not succeeded in solving this problem when  $n$  is too large to use the naive algorithm described in 1.4. The case  $j = 2$  is already not that simple.

A first step is certainly to calculate  $r = r(n, j)$  defined by (4.1), which can be done by the method of § 8.2.1. If we are lucky enough that  $q = p_{j+r+1} - n' = p_{j+r+1} - (n - \sigma_{j+r} + \sigma_r)$  is prime, then the value  $h_j(n) = \frac{N_{j+r+1}}{qN_r}$  is given by (4.24).

In the general case, by setting  $n' = n - (\sigma_{j+r} - \sigma_r)$ , one may think that  $h'_j(n) = \frac{N_{j+r}}{N_r} G(p_{j+r}, n')$  has a good chance to be the value of  $h_j(n)$ . However, there are exceptions.



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	$h_1$	$h_2$	$h_3$	$h_4$	$h_5$	$h_6$	$h$
$n = 2$	2						2
3	3						3
4	3						3
5	5	6					6
6	5	6					6
7	7	10					10
8	7	15					15
9	7	15					15
10	7	21	30				30
11	11	21	30				30
12	11	35	42				42
13	13	35	42				42
14	13	35	70				70
15	13	35	105				105
16	13	55	105				105
17	17	55	105	210			210
18	17	77	110	210			210
19	19	77	165	210			210
20	19	91	165	210			210
21	19	91	231	330			330
22	19	91	231	330			330
23	23	91	385	462			462
24	23	143	385	462			462
25	23	143	455	770			770
26	23	143	455	1155			1155
27	23	143	455	1155			1155
28	23	187	455	1365	2310		2310
29	29	187	715	1365	2310		2310
30	29	221	715	1365	2730		2730
31	31	221	1001	1430	2730		2730
32	31	247	1001	2145	2730		2730
33	31	247	1001	2145	2730		2730
34	31	253	1001	3003	4290		4290
35	31	253	1309	3003	4290		4290
36	31	323	1309	5005	6006		6006
37	37	323	1547	5005	6006		6006
38	37	323	1547	5005	10010		10010
39	37	323	1729	5005	15015		15015
40	37	391	1729	6545	15015		15015
41	41	391	2431	6545	15015	30030	30030
42	41	437	2431	7735	15015	30030	30030
43	43	437	2717	7735	19635	30030	30030
44	43	437	2717	8645	19635	30030	30030
45	43	437	2717	8645	23205	39270	39270
46	43	493	2717	12155	23205	39270	39270
47	47	493	3553	12155	25935	46410	46410
48	47	551	3553	17017	25935	46410	46410
49	47	551	4199	17017	36465	51870	51870
50	47	589	4199	19019	36465	51870	51870

Figure 1: Table of  $h_j(n)$  and  $h(n)$ .